

The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 40 | Number 1

Article 12

February 1973

Homosexuality

Peter Durning

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Durning, Peter (1973) "Homosexuality," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 40: No. 1, Article 12.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol40/iss1/12>

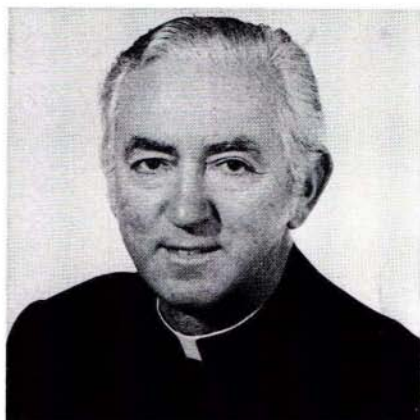
HOMOSEXUALITY

Peter Durning, O.P.

There is now quite a volume of writing about the problem of homosexuality, to which moral theologians within the Church have added their considerable content. It is unfortunately now possible, as Cardinal Hoffner said recently, to set the divergent opinions of theologians side by side and present a picture of confusion. It is not a question of theologians saying the same thing in a different way, but of saying completely different things.

Father Charles E. Curran is a good example of a moral theologian who has taken a comprehensive look at the problem of homosexuality and arrived at his own solution based on his theory of compromise. He gives a brief description of this as follows:

"Catholic theology has neglected the reality of sin in its moral teaching based on the natural law. Precisely because sin forms a part of objective reality, our moral judgments must give more importance to



Father Durning was a Royal New Zealand Air Force pilot for six years during the war and a commercial pilot for the next six years. He then entered the seminary and became a Dominican priest, specializing in philosophy and theology. Two of his brothers are also priests, in different orders. At present, he is chaplain to Auckland University.

sin. The presence of sin means that at times one might not be able to do what would be done if there were no sin present. In the theory of compromise, the particular action in one sense is not objectively wrong because in the presence of sin it remains the only viable alternative for the individual. However, in another sense the action is wrong and manifests the power of sin. If possible, man must try to overcome sin, but the Christian knows that the struggle against sin is never totally successful in this world." ¹

Compromise

He says that homosexual behavior well illustrates the theory of compromise. While affirming that homosexuality can never become the ideal, he contemplates the situation where modern medical science cannot help the homosexual and concludes:

"In this situation which reflects the human sinfulness in which all participate in differing ways, the individual homosexual may morally come to the conclusion that a somewhat permanent homosexual union is the best, and sometimes the only, way for him to achieve some humanity. Homosexuality can never become an ideal. Attempts should be made to overcome this condition if possible; however, at times one may reluctantly accept homosexual unions as the only way in which some people can find a satisfying degree of humanity in their lives." ²

He follows the same line of reasoning to the same practical conclusion in *Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology* where he writes:

"What about the cases in which modern medical science cannot help the homosexual? In these cases it seems to me that for such a person homosexual acts might not even be wrong. I am not saying that such acts are ever a goal or an ideal that should be held up to others to imitate. Homosexual acts for such a person, provided there is no harm to other persons,

might be the only way in which some degree of humanity and stability can be achieved. This would be a practical application of the theology of compromise." ³

It is not my intention to argue out the theory of compromise, but to set out what I consider the clear consistent teaching of the Popes about the legitimate use of the sexual act. Where theologians disagree, as many would, with Father Curran's conclusions (and one has not the background knowledge, the time, nor perhaps, the wit to follow the ramifications of all the divergent arguments), one turns with a sense of relief to the teaching of the Popes, especially as expressed in encyclicals and other documents repeating the same teaching.

Encyclical Teaching

It might be well to remind ourselves at the start of what Pius XII said in the encyclical letter *Humani Generis* about the teaching contained in an encyclical:

"Nor is it to be supposed that a position advanced in an encyclical does not, ipso facto, claim assent. In writing them, it is true, the Popes do not exercise their teaching authority to the full. But such statements come under the day-to-day teaching of the Church, which is covered by the promise, "He who listens to you, listens to me" (Luke x.16). For the most part the positions advanced, the duties inculcated, by these encyclical letters are already bound up, under some other title, with the general body of Catholic teaching. And when the Roman Pontiffs go out of their way to pronounce on some subject which has hitherto been controverted, it must be clear to everybody that, in the mind and intention of the Pontiffs concerned, this subject can no longer be regarded as a matter of free debate among theologians." ⁴

By concentrating on papal teaching concerning the lawful use of the generative instinct, we can then apply this teaching to the problem of homosexuality. In an address to newlyweds on Oct. 29, 1951, Pius XII sums up succinctly the Church's teaching on the lawful use of the generative instinct:

"The golden rule is then this: The use of the natural generative instinct is morally licit only in marriage, in the service of and according to the order of the ultimate reason for marriage itself. . . . The transgression of this norm is as ancient as original sin itself. But in our time there is a danger that people may lose sight of the fundamental principle itself." ⁵

This teaching was already contained in the encyclical *Casti Conubii* of Pius XI. In the following quotation he is speaking of those who have other views as to the nature of the generative instinct:

"The power of generation, they maintain, since it is rooted in nature itself, is more sacred and wider in its scope than marriage; it can therefore be used outside the limits of wedlock as well as within them, and without any regard to the ends of matrimony. . . . Following the lead of these principles, some have gone to the length of inventing new types of union which they suggest as being more suited to the conditions of the modern man and the present age. . . . There are some even who demand legal recognition of these monstrosities, or at least want them to be tolerated by public usage and institution. It does not seem to occur to their minds that in such things there is nothing of that modern 'culture' which they vaunt so highly; that they are, in fact, abominable corruptions which would result even in civilized nations adopting the barbarous customs of certain savage tribes." ⁶

Pope Paul VI

Finally Pope Paul in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* has this to

say about the generative instinct:

"In fact, just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, with particular reason, he has no such dominion over his generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life, of which God is the principle." ⁷

It is precisely because the generative faculties of man and woman have an intrinsic ordination towards raising up life that Pope Paul affirms that this essential procreative meaning of the sex act must necessarily accompany the other meaning of the sexual act which expresses the union of love:

"Nonetheless the Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by her constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act (quilibet matrimonii usus) must remain open to the transmission of life. . . . That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman." ⁸

Although Pope Paul is concerned here directly with the conjugal act, the principles enunciated refer with equal validity to any use of the sexual act. Obviously the use of the sexual act between homosexuals could only be, at its optimum, an expression of the love that unites them. But this unitive meaning would of necessity with homosexuals have to be divorced from the intrinsic procreative meaning inscribed in the nature of the

sexual act itself. Man would, therefore, be guilty of sundering what God has joined together.

Older Approach

Now when Father Curran, or any other moral theologian, tells us that the sexual acts of two homosexuals enjoying a stable relationship may not even be wrong, it would seem that the appreciation of the nature of the generative faculty and its use is different from what papal teaching claims it to be. That this is indeed so is evident from Father Curran's appraisal of modern theology's position as compared with what he calls the older approach:

"Perhaps the greatest error in the older approach is the close connection seen between every sexual actuation and procreation. Procreation is a very important human value. If every sexual actuation outside marriage involves a direct going against actual procreation, then there would be reason to assert the generic gravity of sins against sexuality. However, Catholic theology now realizes the over-importance attached to the relationship between sexuality and procreation in the past."⁹

It is now a commonplace of the intellectual scene that professors pursuing their own insights and inquiries reach opposing and contradictory positions. It is very probable that the great compassion one feels for the lot of the homosexual, unjustly singled out and spurned by many who would call themselves Christian, might make one probe and embrace moral solutions that would seem to grant them relief. But truth is the sure way to health. Happily it is St. Peter's Chair, not the professor's chair, that is the guarantee of the

truths of faith and the authentic interpreter of natural law.

It is false compassion to remove sin from areas of human activity where the constant teaching of the Church has claimed it to be. Nothing more humiliates a man than telling him, "You should not feel guilty because you are only the resultant of a series of social and psychic pressures." Doctors might do something similar if they claimed that because most adults suffer from mushy swellings that distort the linings of the blood vessels, this is normal and not a disease. They would perform little service to their patients dying of heart attacks.

As in the medical, so in the moral sphere, the beginning of recovery to health in body and soul is to know one is diseased. It is only when we are conscious of sin that we begin to call for the divine physician.

"I come not for the healthy but for those who are sick" is the message of salvation.

REFERENCES:

1. *The Thomist*, July, 1971, p. 478.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 479.
3. Curran, Charles E. *Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology*. Fides, 1970, p. 177.
4. Pope Pius XII. *Humani Generis*. *The Australian Catholic Truth Society Record*. Feb., 1951, p. 10.
5. *The Teachings of Pope Pius XII*, edited by Michael Chinigo, p. 32.
6. Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*. London Catholic Truth Society. Second Edition, pp. 24-25.
7. Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*. *New Zealand Tablet*, 1968, p. 15.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
9. Curran, *Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology*, p. 169.