

HOMOSEXUALITY AS A PASTORAL PROBLEM

Priests find little help in the moral theology manuals when they are confronted with cases of homosexuality. If they turn to the psychological literature on the subject, very probably they become more confused, such a riot of opinions do they meet. Were homosexual practices a rarity, the situation would be serious enough, but in view of the fact that indulgence in such tendencies is on the increase—at least in the opinion of many priests consulted by the writer—it is well to consider the nature and complex causality of homosexuality, some of the prevalent attitudes towards it, the insidious philosophy which regards it as unavoidable, and the pastoral treatment of it.

In the preparation of this article the writer has talked with many priests in different dioceses, and he has met with a wide variety of opinions on the subject. Some betrayed an emotional revulsion even to a pastoral discussion of inversion, quoting St. Paul that such things should not even be mentioned among us. Others dismissed the subject with the abrupt declaration that nothing could be done for inverts, and the writer was wasting his time. Still others assumed a harsh attitude of bitter condemnation, which, unfortunately, has driven many homosexuals far away from the reception of the sacraments. Others want to help such penitents but feel wholly inadequate to the problem. Others, again, explained that they had been able to do something with souls so afflicted, at a high price in time, patience, and sacrifice on their part, but with a deep desire to help still more.

The utter need, then, for a pastoral study of the problem has driven the writer to set down these considerations with the hope that they will be of help to some of his fellow priests confronted with a similar situation.

I

Homosexuality, or inversion, is described by some as a sexual perversion, in which attraction exists for one of the same sex instead of the opposite sex. This notion is misleading, giving the impression that the invert has turned away from what he once was, and has directed his sexual instincts into unnatural and sinful channels. Such a definition would make every invert completely responsible for even possessing homosexual tendencies. Catholic moral theology, however, distinguishes between a tendency to sin, and the deliberate gratification of the same. A more accurate description of the homosexual indicates that, while he is apparently normal from a physical point of view, he is entirely unsusceptible to the emotional and sexual attraction of the opposite sex, and attracted to his own.

As Dr. Odenwald points out, the true homosexual is attracted to members of his own sex in both a psychic and erotic manner.¹ His inversion involves three characteristics: (1) erotic attraction towards the same sex; (2) absence of attraction towards the opposite sex; (3) a positive disgust for the opposite sex.

The man whose emotional impulses respond to women as well as to men is not an invert. Usually, his difficulty has sprung from excessive indulgence in lust, since he is constantly seeking sex pleasure in all its diverse forms. The psychologists call him "bisexual." The moralists will consider him probably more responsible than the true homosexual, who, contrary to public opinion, is not necessarily an abnormally lustful person who seeks pleasure in the deliberate perversion of the sexual instinct. Provided that he does not indulge these tendencies, he can control them with the grace of God. His passions are often no stronger than those of normal men.

Usually the invert cannot help having psychic tendencies which are opposite to those of the sexual organs. He did not deliberately nurture them. In every way he finds that he is attracted by his own sex, and not by the opposite. It is far more than a question of the sexual act. His inversion reaches into the very depths of his soul. His whole person is turned towards the world of men and away from that of women. His problem encompasses far more than the control of lust; it involves the orientation of his whole emotional nature in such a way that he may be able to lead a moderately happy life.

A distinction must be drawn between true inversion and certain types of adolescent friendship among members of the same sex. Some see in exclusive friendships of this sort a phase of homosexuality. But, according to Fr. Larère, even when these friendships go so far as to manifest themselves in acts which are characteristic of physical love, it is wrong to make a too hasty diagnosis of them. He points to many factors which may be involved: unhealthy curiosity seeking to satisfy itself, or youthfully sexual passion seeking satisfaction under conditions in which there are no persons of the opposite sex present, and the like. In most cases such disorders are temporary.

Sometimes, however, true homosexuality begins at this age with the preferential love for a member of the same sex causing the fixation and perversion of the normal instinct of sex. The person develops a "crush" upon a member of the same sex, and experiences emotional reactions very similar to teen-age boy-girl love. While it is granted that a situation of this kind may begin with a spiritual, but particular, bond, oftentimes it degenerates

¹ Robert Odenwald, "Counseling the Homosexual," *Priest*, IX (Dec., 1953), 939.

gradually into carnal expression. The reason for this deterioration of an adolescent friendship is a false conception of love. The youth thinks that he can love with the soul alone another young man who loves him in the same way. This is "angelism," a most apt term coined by the French. For usually these individuals are inclined to regard their love as more noble than that between the sexes. They like to fancy themselves as Davids and Jonathans. They presuppose that there is something angelic about love between man and man, while love for women is simply a means of gratification for the carnal passions of men, and, accordingly, does not evoke from the human heart the noblest sentiments of friendship. As in the days of the Greeks, so also today, only the intellectual are capable of these high-level friendships. Supposedly, each loves the other with the soul only. Like the inhabitants of Sodom, refusing the daughters of Lot, the homosexual seeks to rejoin the angel whose passage has awakened in him the desire to deny his origin.

The love of angelism does not seek God, but rather seeks self in neighbor. It is lacking in that supernatural motivation which purifies and elevates human love to the level of divine charity. It is narcissistic, discovering a reflection of self in another being, and rejoicing in the recognition of one's reflection. No wonder then that it is often accompanied by a smug feeling of false superiority.

What the adolescent invert needs is intelligent education in the nature of love. He must exchange the imaginative world for the real world. True heterosexual love—indeed all true love—is a going out of oneself, a gift of oneself, while homosexual love is the purest form of egoism. But at present the adolescent invert is afraid to venture into the real world of men and women.

If, however, the adolescent comes to realize the monstrous nature of his love, it may be the beginning of a sincere conversion; or it may be the beginning of despair, that is, if he accepts his inversion as something inevitable and incurable. In that event he will begin to form liaisons with receptive individuals. Soon he lives by his vice, that is to say, he is marked with it, he is imbued with it. Eventually, his inversion will color all his existence, marking the least of his attitudes.

Such homosexuality is the result of a long emotional misdirection. But in other cases inversion begins with the desire for purely genital satisfaction, the initiation being made by an older companion or adult. The pleasure thereby experienced is the discovery of a new world for the adolescent, and it is sought again and again. So are fashioned the links of bad habit.

There are other alleged causes of homosexuality. Some authors point to

a too exclusively feminine upbringing. For one reason or another—through death or divorce—the father is absent. Perhaps he is present in an inadequate way, that is, he does not fulfill his role in the family government. His wife rules completely.

The background of a dominant mother and an inadequate, submissive father in so many male homosexual case histories is not easy to explain. Keeping in mind that the contribution of environment to the development of homosexuality has not been determined with either precision or certitude, one may venture to speculate on the basis of case histories. Sometimes the boy becomes very attached to his dominant mother and he tends to identify himself with her, so that gradually and imperceptibly he assumes a feminine point of view in all things. He begins to think and to feel as a woman, to share all the interests of his mother. Consequently, during adolescence, he may tend like a girl to seek the company of men. This theory of identification is based upon the assumption that homosexuality is basically a way of thinking, a state of mind, rather than a structural or physiological disturbance.

In other cases, however, the youngster is frightened by the mother and turns to the father and to the company of men. A neurotic fear of the opposite sex develops. Very often in these cases there is a pattern of early seduction with the habit of homosexual activity well established by the close of adolescence. Sometimes, too, a son who has been terrorized by his father seeks affection from another man, a sort of father-substitute, who seduces him and paves the way for the formation of a perverse habit. In contrast to those who first think like women and later act like them, there are others who first are seduced by overt acts and later come to enjoy and to seek such experiences. In short, it is one thing to classify the diverse home conditions of homosexuals; it is quite another to explain the precise relationship of environment to the fact of homosexuality in an individual.

Again, homosexuality is said to be the consequence of parents' attempting to rear their boy in a feminine manner, as witness the tragic example of Oscar Wilde; or the father's pretending that his only daughter is a boy, and rearing the child as if she were a boy, as the invert author of *The Well of Loneliness* points out. But the weakness in these theories which trace the etiology of homosexuality to environmental factors is the truth that many others under similar conditions retain their natural sex tendencies. If inversion were purely environmental, why is it that parents who discover traces of femininity very early in their boy's life do not succeed in imparting to him a more masculine attitude despite every persuasion to rough outdoor games and the like?

In short, the causality of homosexuality is both complex and controversial. Many hold that inversion is innate and organically determined. The invert really belongs to a sort of organic intersex. This he cannot help, according to their theory. Since he is incurable by any means, treatment is useless. Others, holding the same views as regards physical predisposition, hold out some hope of treatment. They use hormonal injections, glandular regulation, and the like. But the success of these treatments has been only moderate, and it would be naive to suppose that they are of value to the vast majority of homosexuals.²

Despite the controversy concerning the causality of homosexuality there is general agreement among psychiatrists that early childhood is a very decisive period in the formation of inverts. Very many case histories of homosexuals indicate a too exclusively feminine upbringing, as has been pointed out already. A boy may imitate his mother so completely that, as he matures, he views life like a woman; and when he has reached the age of adulthood, he is set in his feminine attitude towards men.

In this development the role of the mother towards her son is very meaningful. One psychiatrist pointed out that eighty per cent of homosexuals treated owed their inversion to their mothers. "It is those who love us most who are capable of doing us the greatest harm," says Doctor LeMoal.³ Oscar Wilde expressed the same idea more tersely: "We kill the things we love."

Another determining factor in the development of inversion is the lack of a well-balanced home where mother and father display affection for one another and for the child. The observation is stressed by an invert who has written a book on homosexuality in America. He obtained his information by interviewing the many inverts of his acquaintance, and in almost every case he found broken homes, divorces, early death of father, frigid parents, and the like, as part of the pattern.⁴

A puritanical view of marital intercourse may be the occasion for the development of homosexuality. Puritanism does not reduce his lust, and so he turns to another member of the same sex to gain satisfaction. On the other hand, the very antithesis of puritanism may lead to homosexual practices, that is, if he is reared in a home where the parents are known to be sexually careless and promiscuous. The youngster follows the example of

² *Ibid.*, p. 938.

³ Paul LeMoal, "The Psychiatrist and the Homosexual," *New Problems in Medical Ethics* (Westminster: Newman, 1953), pp. 103-7.

⁴ Donald Webster Cory (pseudonym), *The Homosexual in America* (Greensburg, N.Y., 1951), pp. 66-67.

his parents whose affections he has enjoyed but seldom. Incidentally, this lack of parental affection makes the youth an easy prey to exclusively particular friendships during the critical period of adolescence, when, emotionally starved, he finds what he considers love for the first time in his life.

One also notes in case histories of homosexuals other patterns: the rejected child becoming the victim of an adult homosexual; and the youth, curious for strange experiences, falling into the trap of a homosexual colony in some large city. In short, psychiatric studies of inversion reveal a very complicated skein of contributing factors in their exhaustive case histories of both male and female inverts.

II

Nevertheless, from these clinical studies one may make a few observations apropos of preventive measures. A well-balanced sex education may help many who would be exposed otherwise to the danger of sinning by surprise. Nothing is gained by discouraging the youngster's legitimate curiosity about sex. Thorough understanding of the nobility of the human person and the sacred character of the procreative function will help the youngster to avoid companions who are given to perverted practices.

Again, common sense dictates that a boy should be educated as a boy, and a girl as a girl from the earliest years. Distinction of sex demands different education and rearing for each sex, as Pius XI affirms in his classic letter on education. Need it be said, moreover, that the high frequency of homosexuals who feel that their condition was due, in part, to maternal domination is a warning to fathers as well? In a home where the rule of the father is firm and constant, the boys are usually not inverts. They tend to imitate the manliness of their father. But, of course, there are exceptions.

At this point, the idea that homosexual practices are so rare that they hardly merit pastoral attention may be discussed. This is similar to saying that rare blood diseases should not be the object of medical research, because they are so infrequent. Even if sins of homosexuality were exceedingly rare, they would still be a legitimate object of study for the moralist. Unfortunately, however, homosexual practices seem to be on the increase. Despite the obvious difficulty of forming an accurate estimate of this sin's frequency, because inverts seek secrecy and recoil from society, which is hostile to their practices, still there are some indications. The Kinsey report of 1948 notes that more than one-third of the male population which they had sampled had had some homosexual experience, leading to orgasm, after the advent of adolescence. Ten per cent of the population sampled were found

to be more or less exclusively homosexual for at least a three-year period, and four per cent of the same population were exclusively so for life. However one may question the sampling methods of Kinsey and his colleagues, these figures are startling.

It is not public knowledge how many have been dismissed from various governmental posts because of alleged homosexuality. Suffice to say there were many. Again, Alfred Towne describes the new taste in literature as effeminate. The homosexual is considered as possessed of an extraordinary understanding of life's problems, gifted with unusual poetic sensitivity, endowed with superior intuition of women, and so on. Should this esteem for homosexuals receive widespread acceptance, it would tend to corrupt American culture on all levels. In England overt homosexuality is a national problem. There are many who are endeavoring to repeal the laws which punish overt acts of homosexuality. There would hardly be such a concerted effort to repeal laws of this kind unless there were many engaged in homosexual practices.

More ominous, however, than the increasing incidence of homosexuality itself is the attempt on the part of some writers to pass it off with a sophisticated shrug and even to justify it.

Sophisticated allusions to homosexual practices are made by certain elements in the entertainment world as well. A new army of men dressed like women have made a popular hit of the "drag act" in both movies and television. Thinly veiled references to homosexual practices do not elicit the reaction of horror that one would expect. The fact of homosexuality is passed off with a shrug or made the object of barbed witticisms.

From the acceptance of a practice to the attempt at justification is an easy step, which Donald Cory takes in *The Homosexual in America*. He states that the practice of homosexuality is not a disease of the mind or a moral disorder contrary to nature. Such practices are natural to the invert, and therefore it is foolish to speak of a "cure" for what is basically incurable.

This apologia of an American invert is supported by an English writer, Gordon Westwood. Like Cory, he holds that the full-grown homosexual should be accepted as a *de facto* situation, that will-power joined to the guidance of priest or minister is of little value, that it is best to advise the homosexual to adjust himself to his environment. Adjustment here means the gratification of homosexual impulses while avoiding the fierce penalties of civil law. The invert should seek out another of his kind and live in a quasi-marital relationship. Obviously, relationships of this sort do become known in many cases. Accordingly, the attempt to justify them before the law has been made in England, with much support from self-styled intel-

lectuals, who argue that the law condemning private homosexuality between adult men should be done away with. In general, their position is that such practices are abnormalities, which invert cannot help.

These so-called experts on the problem of homosexuality challenge the usage of the word "cure" apropos of inversion. According to Cory and Westwood, sexual inversion is not a disease, but a consequence of biological or psychological factors, or a mixture of both. Inverts do not desire to be cured, any more than a heterosexual person would want to become an invert, if that were part of his therapy. An invert cannot help being the way he is, and psychiatry can only accept him as he is and help him to adjust himself to his environment. Westwood affirms that the invert who fights against his tendency eventually will commit an overt act of homosexuality, and that is the end of his reputation. His very struggle against such tendencies makes a subsequent explosion more dangerous.

Behind these typical naturalistic viewpoints lurk certain insidious pre-suppositions. First, there is the Freudian notion that complete abstinence from carnal pleasure is impossible to man without damaging effects on mental health. Psychiatrists of this school will apply the principle of determinism to male and female inverts. Since the tendency must be gratified in order to avoid a psychic eruption, the invert should be advised to seek a partner of the same sex with whom he can carry on a clandestine relationship safe from the severe penalties of civil law.

These writers do speak of sublimation, but in a very special sense. Sublimation is a purely sexual force. The male invert, for example, can sublimate his tendency by getting a job teaching in a boys' school. But this attempt at sublimation drains away only part of the sexual force, and the rest must find an outlet in some love-partner. If the invert does not have such a partner, he will very probably slip into some offense with one of his students or with one of his male associates. Ridiculed as unattainable is supernatural and spiritual sublimation, which will be considered later.

III

In contrast with this secularistic and pessimistic attitude, Catholic moralists and psychiatrists offer inverts constructive measures for the avoidance of homosexual acts. Several principles of faith should be reviewed to see whether they have any bearing upon the pastoral treatment of the homosexual.

Catholic theology alone gives man the full truth about his nature, his destiny, and the means which he can use to attain his goal. Every man who has reached the age of reason is either corresponding with divine grace and

living above nature, or he is rejecting grace and living below nature. Adult man never remains purely natural. When he rejects grace in committing a seriously sinful act, he is turning away from his supernatural end. Such is the theological import of every mortal sin. Presupposing that an invert has not become so addicted to his vice as to lose all freedom, it follows that his condition concerns the theologian as well as the psychiatrist. However true it may be that this particular invert is mentally sick, it is just as true that he is morally sick; therefore he needs guidance not only from the psychiatrist but also from the priest. Both are necessary. Both can and must work together in aiding the invert, while each respects the proper province of the other.

It is the proper function of the psychiatrist to inquire into the genesis and development of homosexuality in this individual and to work out some program of reorientation. Unless the priest is himself a psychiatrist, he is not competent to diagnose the complex emotional skein of inversion, or to distinguish a true invert from a bisexual. Still it is profitable for the priest to possess a general knowledge of homosexual types, if only because some individuals will go to a priest before they will go to a psychiatrist, and the priest should possess some sympathetic understanding.

It is the right and duty of the priest to treat the theological aspects of the homosexual's problem. While he understands that the invert needs the expert guidance of the psychiatrist, he sees also the necessity of imparting spiritual directives to the same individual. At the very outset, the priest should discover whether the invert has yielded to his tendencies or has succeeded with the help of divine grace in suppressing them. If, happily, he has avoided homosexual practices up to the present, the priest should guide him to an enriched spirituality by working out for him some ascetic plan of life so that he may cooperate with divine grace in overcoming the fierce temptations of the future. It is to be expected, however, that the vast majority of homosexuals who come to a priest for guidance already have fallen into sins of this kind. In general, then, the suggestions offered have been formulated to help the homosexual who has sinned; nevertheless, they are useful for the invert who has been able to practice self-control, because they are based upon the common need of all men for the aid of divine grace in overcoming the rebellion of the flesh in all its forms.

For the invert who wants to learn self-control the priest can organize a spiritual reorientation program that will parallel the therapeutic procedures of the psychiatrist. It will include a reflective approach by the invert himself to the nature of his disorder, to the meaning of conversion or *metanoia*, to

the manner of achieving unity in his will, and to the ways in which he can correspond daily with divine grace in avoiding the occasions of sin.

Whenever the patient possesses a real set of religious values, collaboration between priest and doctor is rendered more felicitous. Sometimes, however, it happens that the psychiatrist is not too eager to work along with the priest, because previously a delicate cure has been thwarted by the interference of a well-intentioned but ill-informed priest. (By "ill-informed" I mean lacking in knowledge of the causes of mental conflicts and of the more common therapeutic methods used by psychiatrists and psychologists.) Granted that a psychiatrist has been chosen who follows the natural moral law, the priest may limit himself to the corresponding role of spiritual director.

The exact nature of this role will depend upon the age and the condition of the invert. In some cases the persons may be treated like the ordinary victims of bad habits. Such an approach will apply to those who have received treatment, have overcome the habit, and now have relapsed temporarily into the same vice. In most cases of the young, however, the first concern of the priest will be "to break gradually in him the idea of the fatalism of his vice."⁵ Fatalism usually obsesses him. He feels that the habit is stronger than he is, and that he can do nothing about it. In this situation the priest must make the person realize that his inversion is not inexorably determined by heredity or his own physical condition.

The priest will remove anxiety from the mind of the person if he is able to show him that his anomaly is basically a psychological confusion. The invert must see himself as he really is, and then he must begin to amend his way of living. He must be willing both to fight and to accept the failings that may and probably will occur. It may be a long hard struggle lasting over several years as far as the psychiatric treatment is concerned.

At the same time the psychiatrist will try to clear any obsessive misapprehensions from the patient's mind; and in the measure that he is able to rid him of certain fixations and fears will he be able to help him to use his will effectively in the struggle. A weak will is the product of confused and conflicting objectives, and a strong will usually flows from a mind that is very clear concerning its aims. The very notion of aim or purpose does not seem to be exploited sufficiently in the search for therapeutic aids.

Once the male invert is aware of his problem of making a non-sexual adjustment to life, he may be able to work out a plan of life that will help

⁵ Charles Larère, "Passage of the Angel through Sodom," *New Problems in Medical Ethics*, p. 110.

him to live in this manner. He will seek the grace of God to practice supernatural chastity while living in the world. Obviously, the male invert who has suppressed imaginations and desires of a homosexual nature and has never fallen into external sins of this kind is practising already the continence necessary for a prudent solution of his anomaly. No matter whether he has fallen or not in the past, however, it seems advisable that the true male invert abstain from marriage. But before defending this opinion the writer prefers to state the opposite view, and to make several pertinent distinctions.

IV

Some hold that the male invert can overcome his inversion and embrace the married state. Dom Moore, for example, states that the alternatives of marriage or perpetual continence should be made clear to the patient.⁶ But he does not make a clear distinction between a true invert and a bisexual. The situation will be different for those individuals who possess heterosexual as well as homosexual tendencies. Because these are attracted by the opposite sex, they are not true inverts. They are called bisexual. Individuals of this type can control their deviate tendencies and can adjust themselves to married life. The higher the degree of self-control exercised before marriage in suppressing homosexual tendencies, the greater chance the bisexual has of making a happy marriage: "To the extent that a person of either sex has engaged in sex variant activity he or she is less likely to make a satisfactory heterosexual adjustment. The chances of making such an adjustment are less to the extent that substitutive sexual behavior has been prolonged."⁷ So writes George W. Henry in his thorough study of homosexuality. While we allow for his naturalistic point of view, we should gather from his observations an attitude of caution in advising even bisexuals to marry. If an individual of this type were completely repentant of his past deviations from the moral law, then an optimistic viewpoint in regard to marriage might be assumed by the confessor. Each individual case should be weighed on its own merits.

It should not be forgotten that the term "homosexual" is used loosely to cover not only the small group of true inverts lacking in erotic attraction to the opposite sex, but also a rather large group of individuals who may have had overt acts of a homosexual nature at some period of their life, but who possess a definite attraction to the opposite sex. These latter may

⁶ Thomas V. Moore, O.S.B., "The Pathogenesis and Treatment of Homosexual Disorders," *Journal of Personality*, XIV (Sept., 1945), 72.

⁷ George W. Henry, *Sex Variants* (New York, 1948), p. 1027.

find in marriage an efficacious remedy against the deviate side of their character.

Secondly, with respect to the small percentage of true inverts (according to some writers, male inverts compose four per cent of the male population, and female inverts one per cent) a further distinction may be made. It seems that a female invert could render the marriage debt faithfully, bring children into the world, and fulfill at least the essential duties of wife and mother and homemaker. Despite her distaste for marital relations it seems she could fulfill the role which God assigns to most women in this world. Of course, more research on this phase of the problem, about which there are so few sources of reliable information, may lead to a different conclusion on the matter. To repeat, each individual case of inversion must be considered in terms of the person. There are some female inverts who revolt at the very thought of marriage, and for them marriage is inadvisable. Others, however, could marry and by the grace of God could fulfill their role in the family, restraining all the while their homosexual desires.

When it comes to male inverts, however, the writer is inclined to agree with the author of *The Invert*.⁸ A male invert, writing about male inverts, he holds that marriage for male inverts is a mistake; but he admits that there is little definite knowledge concerning the effects of marriage on inverts. His opinion is based on the testimony of the few married men who admitted that they were inverts. Nevertheless, his view would seem to be buttressed by common sense. After all, if one is dealing with a true invert who lacks attraction towards the opposite sex, and is even repelled by them, how can one expect a happy marriage?

Again, it would not be just to the woman who would marry an invert. She would awaken to the realization that her husband was not able to give her full affection, and while she might not be able to understand the true nature of his difficulty, she would know that something was seriously wrong with their relationship. Worse still, she might be exposed to his request for a parody of homosexual relations, or she might suffer the heartrending humiliation of seeing her husband hauled into court on charges of homosexual assault.

Since the first publication of *The Invert* much empiric evidence has been gathered for the opinion that true male inverts do not make for happy marriages. Oftentimes wives leave such husbands. Yet many of these men indulged in homosexual practices before marriage, rendering themselves still less fit for conjugal life. The question that remains unanswered at the

⁸ Anomaly, *The Invert* (London, 1948), pp. 95-116.

present moment is whether or not a true male invert who has never succumbed to his proclivity can force himself to fulfill well the role of a husband in Christian marriage. Would that we had some case histories indicating that chaste inverts had made a happy adjustment in the marital state. It seems almost like a defeatist attitude to say that such individuals cannot live properly in this normal state of human life. Nevertheless, with the evidence at hand, it seems to be the part of prudence to counsel individuals against a state of life in which it is probable that they will not make a happy adjustment. Without denying the right of inverts to marry, then, it seems the safer and more prudent course to counsel them to a life of complete continence in the world.

Suppose, however, a true invert who has married comes to the confessor for advice. In that event he should be exhorted to correspond with the sacramental graces which flow from the sacrament of matrimony. Pius XI teaches that those in the state of matrimony receive special actual graces to fulfill their duties provided they strive to the best of their ability and with unwearied effort. These graces are there for the invert who seeks them; and, if he applies himself to the careful observance of his duties, however repugnant they may be to him, he will discover that the power of such grace will become more effectual as time goes on.⁹

It must be kept in mind that advice given by the confessor to the invert is adapted to the state of life in which he actually is. An analogy is in order. Were a student for the priesthood to hesitate on the threshold of the subdiaconate and present serious difficulties to his confessor, he should be advised to wait before embracing the additional duties which come with this step. The confessor would not ignore the objections of the student and would not persuade him to go on with the anticipation of future sacramental graces in the priesthood. Still the same confessor would use an entirely different approach if his penitent happened to be a young man actually ordained to the priesthood and seemingly not fit for its more rigorous demands. Then he would follow St. Paul and urge the priest to stir up the graces which were in him by the imposition of hands. In like manner the counsel of the confessor will differ when he is dealing with a chaste unmarried invert and when he is guiding a married invert.

⁹ AAS, XXII (Dec. 31, 1930), 539. Cf. also Vermeersch-Bouscaren, *What is Marriage?* (New York: America Press, 1944), p. 29, n. 76, wherein it is said that the encyclical attributes a peculiar efficacy to the prayers of the parties "to obtain what is necessary or useful for them in every situation in which they may find themselves."

v

The invert will not be able to practice the perpetual continence necessary for his happiness unless he corresponds with the grace of God. In the life of St. Augustine, as told in his *Confessions*, one finds the elements that enabled him to lift himself up from the morass of lust and to make the decision to lead a life of perpetual chastity. These factors were: (1) the realization that chastity is a supernatural gift; (2) the achievement of unity of purpose in his own will; (3) the consequent decision to dedicate his life to an ascetical ideal; and (4) constant prayer for what he calls "healing grace."¹⁰

From an analysis of each of these factors the confessor and spiritual guide will find much that will help him in guiding the invert who has fallen into a homosexual practice and is desirous of overcoming it. In making this study the writer is fully aware that crude pan-religionism should be avoided in the treatment of the homosexual. In no way does he imply that the role of the spiritual guide supersedes and renders unnecessary the work of the psychiatrist; but he maintains that there is something that can be done by the priest, and should be done by him, because homosexual practices involve sin, the rejection of divine grace, and the necessity for restoration to the state of grace. In fact, the guidance of a priest is rendered all the more necessary by the spiritual condition of many inverts, who have not learned how to make their religion an integrating and vitalizing factor in the struggle against homosexual tendencies.¹¹

Many homosexuals are afraid to give up their partners, because they feel that they shall be lonely and miserable without them. St. Augustine experienced an analogous fear: "The plain truth is that I thought I should be impossibly miserable if I had to forego the embraces of a woman."¹² This fear of Augustine was rooted in a false conception of continence. At this point in his life he considered this virtue within the natural powers of man, but beyond his own infirmity; but later he drew up the formula: "Give me the power to do what you command and command whatever you will."¹³

¹⁰ John F. Harvey, *The Moral Theology of the Confessions of St. Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1951), pp. 83-85, 94-110, 147-54.

¹¹ Victor White O.P., *God and the Unconscious* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), p. 147. Speaking of neurotics in general, Fr. White says their religion is "precisely one of the elements in the disorder, and it is precisely failing to fulfill its function of integration and coordination."

¹² *Confessions of St. Augustine*, 6, 11, 20, tr. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1951), p. 96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10, 29, 40.

Likewise, the homosexual will never be able to bridle completely his tendencies until he realizes that this difficult self-control is a gift of God. The first principle of Alcoholics Anonymous is the heartfelt acknowledgment of human helplessness and divine omnipotence. It is the same for the homosexual. Therapeutic measures on the human level are helpful only if they are based upon the supernatural character of continence. That is why the naturalistic approach to homosexuality had led to the conclusion that it cannot be controlled. Granted that divine grace does not exist, a naturalistic conclusion would be perfectly correct. God, however, will always grant the gift to those who ask it.

The role of divine grace in the therapy of homosexuality is a very difficult question. By its nature the action of divine grace is beyond human investigation and appraisal. There is only an analogy between the kind of therapy which is called psychological and that which is termed spiritual. But the basic idea is the same, and that is to restore a faculty to a healthy state of functioning. Grace may be called "healing" in the sense that it restores the intellect and will of man to their domination over the passions, overcoming the moral infirmity produced by the rebellion of man's lower nature. Going above the natural level, grace becomes the very source of a type of activity, which surpasses absolutely the powers of nature, elevating the intellect and will to the supernatural plane. Since grace produces this effect, it is called "elevating." In practice, healing grace may be regarded as actual, transient, and prior to elevating grace, which introduces the soul into the more stable condition of sanctifying grace. It should be noted, however, that the same actual grace can be both healing and elevating.

Repeatedly, St. Augustine refers to the healing powers of grace in the record of his odyssey from habitual sin to the state of supernatural life. He loves to contrast the blindness of the soul subject to some form of concupiscence with the light found in the soul which has been converted to the new life of grace. He paints the picture of his own soul, at first in the darkness of rationalized sin, then gradually emerging into the light of truth under a constant stream of actual graces, and finally bursting into the full light of conversion after reading St. Paul in the garden. In these manifold delineations of divine grace at work one finds certain basic truths repeated. To speak of God shedding light upon one's conscience is Augustine's way of saying that one grows in supernatural self-knowledge by the help of grace. Likewise, St. Augustine uses the metaphors of eyes and ears to indicate that the first work of divine grace is in the intellect of man. To say that God "heals" his eyes or "opens" his ears means that God helped the groping Augustine to arrive at an adequate understanding of his destiny, to gain a

realization of the malice of his sins, and to see the beauty of the Christian life as his real heritage.¹⁴

Many psychiatrists who do not accept the notion of illuminating grace speak nevertheless about a crucial moment of realization in the treatment of a neurosis. This is the moment, they say, when the patient begins to understand the foolishness of his behavior and the motivations which have brought it about. He sees himself as he really is, and it is a very painful sight. If he accepts the uncomplimentary truth about himself, he may be on the road to mental health; but without adequate self-knowledge of the causes of his inner conflicts, there is not even a beginning of therapy. What applies to the natural level applies by and large to the supernatural level.

The story of the conversion of St. Augustine, for example, particularly the scene in the garden where he is reading St. Paul, illustrates that the grace of God can flood the soul with an enlightened self-understanding which is the beginning of conversion. This illumination of the mind leads to the formation of a new set of values. The objects which seemed so attractive a few moments before fade away before an overwhelming appreciation of the beauty of the life of friendship with Christ. The soul begins to want something entirely different from what it has sought consciously up to the moment of sudden inner illumination. Contrariwise, it begins to despise the objects which have blinded it to the truth. It begins to see all of reality under a new and supernatural light. This is the intellectual root of conversion of life. It involves far more than a mere act of the will, although it is completed by an act of the will.

In the case of St. Augustine divine grace first enlightened his mind, enabling him to break through the spell of carnal pleasure long enjoyed and to discern the attractiveness of the chaste life. What he was and what he ought to be he saw in all their painful contrast. A long series of illuminating graces had drawn him to a state of mind analogous to the crucial moment of realization stressed by the psychiatrists. The light of grace had enabled him to understand not only his enchantment by a bad habit but also the steps he must take to overcome it. Thereupon he made a resolution to begin a new life of dedication to Christ.

The same actual graces will come to the homosexual who prays for light to understand the nature of his disorder. While he continues to receive treatment from a psychiatrist, he must also seek supernatural help. If he has committed deliberate acts of homosexuality, he is in the state of mortal sin, and he cannot rise from that state by natural therapy alone. Accordingly,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 7, 15; 4, 5, 11; 7, 8, 12; 10, 27, 38; *et passim*.

in any program of therapy for the overt homosexual prayer and divine grace are an integral, nay more, an essential element.

Very often homosexuality implies the deification of the ego. One invert writer said that God was his ego. Such a mode of reasoning represents the consummate state of inversion. It accents the truth that mature inversion is essentially an utter perversion of the spiritual as well as the psychical nature of man. Therefore, prayer and divine grace are necessary to bring about a radical change of mind and heart which is the beginning of the conquest of this bad habit.

Once the priest is aware of the fact that the habit of homosexuality is not merely a psychiatric problem, but also a moral and spiritual problem, involving a rejection of divine grace, he should endeavor to imbue his penitent with a similar penetration of his need for divine assistance. The priest should explain how actual grace enlightens the mind and strengthens the will and helps even sinners to perform the acts which lead to the state of sanctifying grace. The invert must believe that the least amount of grace is able to overcome the strongest motions of concupiscence. He must believe that with the aid of divine grace he will be able to avoid every mortal sin.

The invert, however, must not expect grace to work like magic. There remain the inveterate tendencies characteristic of any bad habit, and these depart reluctantly, if at all. Although in a particular case the tendencies would remain as strong as ever, divine grace to resist them would always be stronger still. The invert who renews his trust in the supernatural help of grace will not be lacking in will power to avoid sin. Gradually the thoughts and aspirations of the penitent invert will be turned into spiritually rich channels. Accordingly, the invert must not be dismayed that the impulses and emotional life continue to hanker for the pleasure which the practice of homosexuality gave him. No matter how violent these temptations, the invert has nothing to fear, as long as he continues to pray and to resist them.

Again, the invert should not confuse divine grace with natural therapies. Indirectly, however, prayer does confirm genuine therapy, because it elevates the mind of man to his supernatural destiny and buttresses the will with the resolution to overcome its weakness. In short, the invert should adopt the optimistic viewpoint of the great Doctor of Grace who states in his *Confessions* that eventually divine grace can heal all the wounds of sin, even the slightest motions of concupiscence. Courage, determination, optimism, these virtues must be in the soul of the invert who wants to conquer himself. It is a fierce conflict, but it can be won with divine armor.

The benefits to be derived from the frequent reception of the sacraments

of penance and the Eucharist are beyond evaluation. Under the prayerful guidance of a prudent confessor the penitent invert realizes that he is receiving a reservoir of divine grace. His confession does not merely make him feel good; joined to the absolution of the priest, it makes him good. Repeated self-accusation on one's knees to the representative of the Redeemer will bring more insight into the invert's soul than any amount of comfortable intellectual discussion with the learned. Necessary as conferences with psychiatrists may be at times, they are not adequate to the solution of the moral problem. The efficacious power of the sacraments of penance and of the Eucharist must complete on the supernatural level what the psychiatrist begins on the natural level. *Gratia perficit naturam*.

The additional nourishment of daily Communion can enrich immeasurably the interior life of the invert and compensate for the loneliness which tends to cloud the penitent's outlook during the period immediately following the painful disruption of a pleasant, but illicit, association. Frequent Communion heals, as it were, the wounds present in the invert's soul after his repentance. Needless to say, frequent confession and Communion help the invert who has never sinned against purity to retain his virtue. An experienced confessor will direct him in regard to problems of recreation and occupations.¹⁶

VI

It is very important that the priest accept the admissions of the invert with understanding and discretion, because it is a most difficult moment for him. There is perhaps no other admission so painful to make as that of being homosexual. One homosexual told the writer that he was not even human ("not even a man"); he rationalized his manner of life with the further explanation that his ugliness drove him into homosexual practices. Consequently, the priest must ask questions with extreme delicacy. He must try to awaken confidence in the invert before he proceeds to speak of spiritual remedies. For many inverts it will be the first time that they shall have been able to speak of it openly without seeing a pharisaic look or a naive stare of astonishment on the face of their listener. If the priest gains such *rapproch*, it is the beginning of a change and he should make good use of it to create an atmosphere of complete trust.

The priest must not forget his aim, which he shares with the psychiatrist, of changing completely the mental outlook of the homosexual. Another manner of thinking, willing, and loving must replace the old. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the conversion will reach the spontaneous

¹⁶ For some excellent suggestions cf. Anomaly, *The Invert*, pp. 129-51, 257-70.

feelings of the individual. These may remain homosexual in character. Indeed in the case of the invert who has succeeded in suppressing his own tendencies the word "change" must be understood in a more restricted sense. For him change means a greater effort to reach goals of supernatural perfection and of charitable service to his neighbor, a more vigorous striving to put himself out in the fulfillment of his vocation in life. For him change means a spiritual plan of life so as to live chastely in the world. For the homosexual, however, who has indulged his impulses the term "change" means all this and something more. The additional factor in his conversion is the education, the re-education, of the will.

Most particularly is his will sick, sick not merely in the ordinary conflicts between the flesh and the spirit, which are the common lot of the sons of Adam, but also in the helplessness of the will to cope with fears and compulsions of various sorts. As already pointed out, both priest and doctor must cooperate in their common aim of re-educating the will. Towards this goal they have the help of St. Augustine, who has given to Christian civilization the most profound analysis of the sickness of the will ever written.

In the Eighth Book of the *Confessions*, St. Augustine describes two different types of conflict in the will. The first is the classic battle between flesh and spirit, which St. Paul had explained in Romans, chapter seven, and elsewhere. The second is the battle between spirit and spirit, the conflict within the will itself, whenever it is drawn apart by equally attractive objectives on both sides. The sources of this second conflict are confusion of purposes in the intellect and duality of aims in the will. A weak will is a divided will, and a strong will is a unitive will, i.e., a will possessed of clarity of aim and singleness of purpose. It knows what it wants and it pursues it with all the energy of its soul. Were St. Augustine advising an overt homosexual, he would bid him to reflect upon the inevitable frustration of hardened inversion, to detest it, and to concentrate all his determination upon the acquisition of the divine gift of continence. "Lord, give me the grace to do what you command, and command whatever you please."

Happily, the priest occasionally meets a case in which, despite profound tendencies, no positive act of homosexuality has been committed. The severe vigilance which has made this integrity possible already augurs well; and the direction of the priest must impress the subject with the truth that temptation to an abnormal sin is not a sin in itself, although it may cause an inner revulsion. Indeed the invert battling against his tendencies with courage and determination possesses far more manliness than the so-called "he-man" who will not control his lust. It is significant that the Latin words for "man" and "virtue" are so closely related and stem from the same Latin

root meaning strength and power. A man's virtue is not measured by his physical characteristics. There are men who possess the outward appearance of effeminacy and yet practice heroic virtue; and there are others who seem possessed of virility and yet, under stress, betray the weaknesses of children. Popular prejudices to the contrary, many effeminate men are not homosexuals.¹⁶ Needless to say, the homosexual who has expressed himself in act will find the path more difficult, inasmuch as the erring instinct will tend to obsess him and to lead him back into his vice.

A condition indispensable for success in the treatment of the overt homosexual is a new milieu. This is extremely difficult for him, since the attractive nature of his environment is one of the chief factors in the growth of his inversion. In contrast to the loneliness which the invert has experienced in the company of normal men, he finds understanding, companionship, and warmth in the presence of his homosexual friends. Oftentimes he is a person of gifted nature, and he has found a real source of intellectual inspiration in his invert surroundings.

When he does try to break away from his homosexual friends, they will pursue him in much the same fashion as the lover pursues his beloved. Visits, cards, letters, telephone calls and the like usually follow. True though it may be that his friends may not intend consciously to renew overt relations, they want to cling to the would-be-reformer. Frequently, a moment of weakness means serious sin again, just as it does in normal illicit relations between man and woman. Consequently, the invert must not allow himself to compromise on the issue of a new environment. If he does, probably he will slip again into his vice.

It should not be forgotten that when a man rids himself of one form of pleasure he must find another. The void in the human heart must be filled with a new kind of hope and love. The invert would not have remained so long in his vice had he not found this form of love rewarding and satisfying, delighting him more than anything else. Naturally, he fears the future like a bleak desert. And at this point the priest has the opportunity to give spiritual guidance of the greatest moment. He must show the invert the richness of the charity of Christ, which is diffused in the hearts of all those who have attained the state of sanctifying grace. He must show him that inverted love is suicidal by its very nature, cutting itself off from the richness of humanity, and revolting against the law of divine love, which demands that we must give all our love to the Source of our being. Man must lose his life in order to find it truly.

To the adolescent who has become infatuated with an older man em-

¹⁶ Cory, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

phasis must be placed upon the truth that the invert is running away from the full life that God intends for each of us. While enjoying the present, he is planting the seeds of loneliness and despair for the future.

Doubtless the most difficult case to handle is that of the confirmed homosexual, about whom there is an air of hopelessness. But neither he nor the priest must consider the case hopeless. The very fact that this individual has come to the priest for help indicates that he still cares about his salvation and wants to do something about it. He is enchained in his vice, which he rejects and yet desires. He has that *aegritudo animi*, that indecision, that divided will of which St. Augustine speaks. He still retains the faith, but he is not far from despair. What must the priest do in this case? Fr. Larère advances the opinion that this individual must be treated as insane.¹⁷ He is certain that in the case of the confirmed homosexual there is a submersion of reason by a more powerful instinctive force. It is insanity on one point alone with lucid intervals when moral judgment asserts itself.¹⁸ Before a priest could subscribe to such an opinion, however, he would have to be in very close contact with the patient's psychiatrist and probe the reality of the insanity. Otherwise, how would he know that the individual has moments of moral insanity? Indeed, Rudolph Allers holds that we cannot know anything about the true nature of "allegedly irresistible impulses unless we know all we can find out about the total personality." Neither the psychiatrist nor the confessor has to deal with the isolated phenomenon of an impulse; both deal with a human person whom the impulse seizes.¹⁹

In a given case it may be impossible for the priest to ascertain the degree of responsibility of the penitent. If he has good reason to believe that the freedom of the penitent is notably diminished, he may presume that the penitent did not sin mortally. In practice, the confessor may be lenient in his judgment, if he has good reason to believe that the homosexual practices are part of a general neurotic pattern. But, supposing the penitent himself raises the question of his responsibility for each fall, what then? It is best to tell him that no categorical answer may be given. Do not tell him that he is not responsible. Do not tell him that he is completely responsible. Presume some freedom, and therefore some responsibility. Time and experience will determine how free the will is in the face of this malady in its mature form. The case is analogous to that of the full-fledged alcoholic. Without encouraging him to rationalize in any way, help him to get a grip

¹⁷ Larère, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Rudolph Allers, "Irresistible Impulses," *American Ecclesiastical Review*, C (Mar., 1939), 219.

on himself. He must regain the consciousness of being the master of his own actions. After that, responsibility can be discussed in detail.

In helping all forms of inverts it is well for the priest to remember that many will confide far more freely in him than they will in a psychiatrist. Inverts feel more confident in talking out their troubles with a priest because of the rigorous nature of the sacramental seal of secrecy. On the other hand, they know that the doctor may consult with other doctors about their case; and this they resent, even though they realize that such consultation is often necessary. The unfortunate consequence is that they are not as frank with the doctor as the nature of their disorder demands.

Again and again the priest must repeat that the present ordeal of the homosexual will end in spiritual victory if he corresponds with the grace of God. Through continual encouragement the priest shows that he understands the invert's titanic internal struggle. It is not a hopeless conflict. Anomaly, the author of *The Invert*, reveals that he has gained a magnificent spiritual profit from his struggle. He expresses the opinion that other inverts should let it be known that they lead Christian lives in spite of their homosexual tendencies.²⁰

Anomaly holds also that the invert can sublimate his homosexual tendencies by undertaking works of social charity in the service of large groups of men. With this opinion, of course, the pagan Cory is in sharp disagreement. It seems to the writer, however, that there will be need for something more fundamental than the sublimation of a tendency. A supernatural purpose must be the prime motive force. Love for Jesus Christ and dedication to Him by serving our fellow men can give the invert something to live for, something to give him peace of soul and fortitude. Doubtless, many inverts who are acting for such a sublime motive do not find their way into psychiatric case histories.

At this juncture it should be stressed that the female invert has characteristics similar to those of the male with the following refinements. It has already been pointed out that the female can adjust herself to an outwardly normal family life more easily than the male. Moreover, the opportunities for children and family stability found in marriage attract the woman invert more than they attract the male. It is easier for a female invert to submit to sexual relations than it is for a male invert to initiate them. Often the thought of becoming a mother counterbalances the revulsion which she experiences in marital relations. It is known that many woman homosexuals are prostitutes, having constant relationships with

²⁰ Anomaly, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-47.

men, while reserving their affections for women. Regardless of a woman's tendencies, there is always greater pressure on her towards marriage as a matter of social expediency or economic necessity. A woman invert may be led to marry where a male invert would not. Studies indicate that there are four times as many male inverts as female. Studies likewise seem to show that the chief effect of marriage upon the female invert is to stop her homosexual activity. The same is not true of male inverts. The male invert is more promiscuous than the female, who continues her relationship with another woman over a much longer period of time. The homosexual relationship is often the outgrowth of a long-standing association with another woman in the same profession and condition of life. Older unmarried professional women closely drawn to one another over many years may slip into homosexual practices. But it must be remembered that there are comparatively few cases even in these circumstances. Female homosexual practices are more difficult to ascertain, and rigorous legal action against them seldom is pressed. Often the female homosexual has no appreciation of her place in life, and a consequent sense of inadequacy and loneliness.

Finally, it may be well to note that cases of genuine spiritual progress, made under priestly guidance along the lines suggested in this article, are by no means unknown in pastoral practice. Such cases give the lie to those pessimistic experts who hold that the only solution to homosexuality is to indulge in it discreetly. There is a Christian solution for the moral implications of the problem. It includes honesty on the part of the invert in facing up to the problem and in avoiding the occasions of sin. It includes the determination to get well spiritually. It includes constant prayer for the grace of God—with frequent confession and Communion and with a plan of ascetical striving in the world. Finally, it includes close cooperation between priest and psychiatrist.

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