

# Response

## Denis Geraghty on Gramick and Furey's *The Vatican and Homosexuality*

My review article, 'The Homosexual and the Vatican' (September, pp.392—9), must indeed have been 'almost unintelligible' to Father Denis Geraghty (October, p.455), else he could scarcely have so bluffly misunderstood me. I think him right to deny 'any real parallel between sexuality in the marriage relationship', on his stated procreational understanding of it, and homosexual activity (and, I should add, quite a lot of heterosexual activity). But he has no need to appeal to 'the moral vision of the Church' to establish that, for procreative purposes, homosexual 'activity is disordered'—the judgement of physiology suffices.

If, as Father Denis very much doubts, the Gramick and Furey 'symposium' adds *anything* to the debate', then it does so by adducing evidence, of a kind that ought pleasantly to surprise Cardinal Ratzinger and his colleagues, to reinforce the wise insistence of the Vatican letter that 'the Church is thus in a position to learn from scientific discovery but also to transcend the horizons of science' (n.2). The position at the moment is that any attempts at transcendental inference would be better delayed until much more has been learned empirically at Rome about the homosexual condition, as distinct from homogenital activity.

We cannot even be sure that the Cardinal's Congregation knows just what the term 'condition' signifies in its letter to the bishops. Thus (within a single crucial section, n.3): the Latin text equates *condicio* with *propensio*, and its official English translation consistently renders the former by 'condition' but the latter variously by 'tendency', 'inclination' and 'orientation' (though never by 'propensity'). Yet none of these terms means the same as condition, and each differs significantly from the others in relation to activity. Intelligible? (Nor is the Congregation's syntax all that it should be: 'propensionem ... inclinatur' should be 'propensionem inclinare' n.3.).

'In this as in other sexual matters', if Father Denis will allow some fine tuning of his words, 'the attitude of the Church' must strive more firmly 'to be based on solid morality and sound commonsense'. I find rashly premature his assertion that homosexual people 'will never get' approval.

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Denis Geraghty's forthright stance in *New Blackfriars* re *The Vatican and Homosexuality* came as somewhat of a surprise because there are so few today, except the very 'foolish', who are prepared to stand up for principle and for their convictions. So he would surely now support me were I to say how right, in principle, were the detractors of Galileo when they proclaimed his ideas to be 'stark staring bonkers', being not only against the natural law (in other words *disordered*) but also against the consistent doctrine of the Church. And then there were all those others, particularly in the sixteenth century, who argued against innovators who maintained that human beings should not be enslaved. Such an idea was manifestly against God's creation, being against the natural order of things (Aristotle's philosophy was much appealed to here), and contrary to the teaching of St Paul and the Church's constant tradition. The people in that minority too were surely 'stark staring bonkers', and yet there are only a minute number of Christians today (very largely or almost entirely in South Africa) who have the courage to support the traditional view (or something effectively equivalent to it) and proclaim it publicly. The world's judgement on them at the moment is harsher than that they are 'stark staring bonkers', but they will surely welcome Denis Geraghty's support. Perhaps I go a little too far here, but it is good to know for certain on whose side people really are—even if it is not actually intended.

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## **Bath at Lourdes**

### **Achille Formis**

The butchers of Heaven  
with their blue aprons  
in the bare grey cave-like room  
where the pool is as silent as ice  
... waiting still ...  
ready to offer a miraculous event  
... still