

NOT ALL THAT ANOMALOUS

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MORAL indignation is no substitute for moral information, not least on the subject of homosexuality, and therefore two recent books are recommended. The first, which is free from preoccupations with the circumstances of criminal proceedings or clinical treatment, is an examination of the family background, social behaviour, and activities of one hundred and twenty-seven cases; that they amount to a representative sample is not claimed, yet they do help to dispose of some popular misconceptions, for instance, that male homosexuality spells effeminacy or that seduction has any appreciable effect on the perpetuation or development of the condition. The second is a revised edition of a summary account of the modern evidence, mainly anthropological, biological, and physiological, together with suggestions for treatment.¹

Yet among the items in the bibliographies, 134 and 203 respectively, only two are directly concerned with morals, and through no fault of the authors.² Have, then, the English theologians failed to fill a gap which affects perhaps one Englishman in every twenty-five? Or have they good reason?

Let us reflect that however much a misfit a homosexual may appear to some systems of reference, to an interior theology devoted to the growth of friendship with God and our neighbour he is not a queer or an odd man out, but one with the rest of us, heir to the same original sin and the same promise, beset by temptations and fortified by the graces which are fundamentally the same for him and for us. He is a special case only in the temper of that section in moral theology which deals with the exceptional gifts and the determinate categories constituted by the various orders, offices, and canonical states in the Church; and as the classical masters have always been suspicious about dividing the children of God into clerics and the rest, or religious people into the professionals and the amateurs, or the faithful into those who cultivate mysticism and

¹ *A Minority*. A Report on the Life of the Male Homosexual in Great Britain. Prepared for the British Social Biology Council. By Gordon Westwood. Foreword by Sir John Wolfenden. (Longmans; 30s.). *Homosexuality*. By D. J. West. (Pelican; 3s. 6d.).

² These are Dr D. S. Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955) and the *Interim Report* of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council (1954). Dr M. J. Buckley's *Morality and the Homosexual* presumably appeared too late for inclusion. It was reviewed in the March issue of BLACKFRIARS by Dr Eric Strauss.

those who are gratefully surprised if they can keep the Ten Commandments, so a contemporary theologian will not be disposed to adopt the unproven theory that a homosexual is genetically a member of a race apart. True, he is a special person, but then, so is everybody else.

Moreover this solidarity, which might be conceded in other fields, applies also to the cardinal virtue of temperance and in that function of it which is called chastity, whether this be taken as a quality of the pure in heart, according to the full scope of the Gifts and the Fruits of the Spirit, or whether it be limited more narrowly according to an Aristotelian scheme of the virtues.³ In other words, virtuous sexuality—the phrase is not so prim as it sounds—is profoundly the same for the homosexual and the heterosexual. The purpose of this article is to bring forward this truth from the background of moral theology. What it will labour may seem a far cry from the urgencies of social medicine, but if remote it will not be ineffectual if it offers some reassurance that a perfectly ordinary condition is not in fact a morbid affliction and so perhaps forestall any likeness to Kempff's Disease—acute homosexual panic.

Now moral theology is a science; it does not merely gesture at right and wrong in general, but makes a map in which the proper places for the various kinds of human activity conducive or not to the good life are exactly delineated. The first efforts of the moralists resembled those of the early cartographers, imaginative and vague about the shape of the Indies or the domains of Prester John. The thirteenth century, however, achieved an articulation of the virtues and the vices which has served as the groundwork for moral theology ever since.⁴ Briefly, the distribution of topics follows the order of the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, and of the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, and under each of these seven headings there are detailed subdivisions. The lesser men may appear mesmerized by their methodology, but the real authorities never imagine that their abstractions can be reproduced in real life as they stand, or that the virtues and the vices can be shut up in different compartments. They are as critical of dissection as any *Gestalt* psychologist could desire; St Thomas, for instance, constantly recalls the reader to singleness of human activity in the concrete.

The purpose of fortitude and temperance is to render the individual composed under the stresses of emotion. Distinct, because the impact of fear on us differs from that of pleasure, they both

³ See *Summa Theologiae*, 1a-2ae. lxx, 3, 4. 2a-2ae. cli, 2.

⁴ e.g. *Summa Theologica*, 1a-2ae. liv, lx, lxi. 2a-2ae. xlvi, lxxx, cxxviii, cxliii.

agree in being qualities, not of the spiritual soul (or, as we might say, manifestations of will-power), but of the animated human body; their effect is to strengthen and temper, not to weaken and prohibit the sensitive appetites to which they communicate the air of reasonable and gracious living.⁵ Thus a man does not make himself brave by forcing himself to be callous, or temperate by training himself to be unresponsive to pleasure; these are vices, and there are names for them. Temperance, then, is not a wet-blanket. Its opposite is not lust, but superfluous lust, not pleasure but immoderate pleasure, immoderate either because too much or not enough—and to be excessive does not mean to be too great in itself but for the occasion, as with the young widow of the eighteenth-century epitaph, whose nerves were too fine for the rude shocks of this rough world so that she expired in a transport of excessive sensibility.⁶

In one sense temperance is a general condition of all virtue. The theologians take over the teaching of the Stoics, and recognize the beauty of reserve and detachment and the dangers of 'spiritual fornication'.⁷ We shall pick up this theme later, but turn in the meantime to temperance as a special virtue with its own limited objectives. These are defined as maintaining the measure of reason amid bodily pleasures, and principally those associated with the sense of touch. It may be thought that this is rather a barrack-room approach, but there it is: as that part of temperance, which we may henceforth neglect, which rules the pleasures of eating and drinking is described as being against stuffing and swilling with only secondary reference to savour and bouquet, so that part which rules sex is referred to rather bluntly and ungallantly as connected with the *usus necessariorum, puta feminae*. Clearly sex so treated does not lie in the depths; it does not belong to the world of Keats, still less of Havelock Ellis, but is a brisker and more matter-of-fact affair altogether, pregnant with social implications but for the individual highly pleasurable and free from the vapours.⁸

This does not deny to sex the wider values of tenderness, generosity, gratitude, dedication, devotion and play. It merely restricts sex to a bodily function, including the thoughts, words, and deeds which may lead up to its complete expression, when treated as the proper object of a very specific and particular virtue. Let us repeat, the moralists do not imagine that this abstraction can be insulated in real life, for as involving social and political needs sexuality

⁵ 1a-2ac. lvi, 4.

⁶ 2a-2ac. cxli, 1, 2; cxlii, 2.

⁷ See 2a-2ac. cxliv, cxlv.

⁸ 2a-2ac. cxli, 4, 5.

extends into justice, and as lifted to the dignity of a sacrament it cannot be considered apart from the wedding of Christ with his Church. Nevertheless, as will presently appear, the making and keeping of a distinct category does help to set some bounds to the problem of homosexuality.

To begin with, the special virtue of temperance as so defined is not only the last of the virtues to be enumerated, it is also in many respects the least. The point should be emphasized, for sentiments of shame reinforced by convention, and thickened rather than thinned by current psychological debunking of homiletic rhetoric, has conspired to give unchastity a lonely eminence among the vices. Homosexual unchastity in particular touches off feelings of outrage. Yet it is necessary to keep things in proportion; there are nobler virtues than keeping free from bodily indulgence, vices more depraved than emotional irregularity.⁹ This is not to gloss over the wickedness, for impurity can be grave enough in all conscience, and we should avoid the fallacy of thinking that some things are not bad because others are worse, just as we should avoid the fallacy, not uncommon among the devout, of thinking some things are not good because others are better.

If the arguments for the wrongfulness of unchastity or *luxuria* be closely inspected it will be noticed that the stress is laid on the social importance of regulated sexuality, rather than on the emotional balance, in effect on justice rather than on temperance. Furthermore, experience teaches that the wrong, as regards both the effect on the individual's own character and on others, is less the specific quality of intemperance, namely the unbridled pleasure, than the surround of fears, lies, sadness, unfairness, evasions, substitutions, and perhaps jealousies likely to be set up. Its gravity in practice is that of a capital sin, its main threat its brood of other vices, such as those set forth by St Gregory—blindness of mind, thoughtlessness, rashness, fecklessness, being wrapped up in the present and fearing for the future, self-centredness, and a distaste for heavenly things.¹⁰ Discount the widespread streak of puritanism, and most of us will feel, certainly in the case of others, that mistakes of exuberance are more excusable than mistakes of meanness, and, in the case of ourselves, that we are more retarded by our fears than by our pleasures.

This argument is not meant to plead extenuation, but to reduce the size of the problem. For when moral theology is considering the homosexual in terms of temperance then it is interested in him as he is in himself according to his own personal poise of reason amid

⁹ 2a-2ac. cxli, 8.

¹⁰ 2a-2ac. cxliii, 5.

emotion, and leaves for consideration elsewhere the social consequences of what he may or may not do. Here, knowing that the virtues of fortitude and temperance are subjective in the sense that their pitch varies for each person, unlike justice which is more objective in the sense that its measure is more impersonal and fixed, and is satisfied when our dealings are fair whatever our moods, the theologian will be wary about adopting too simplified a definition of what constitutes normal sexual behaviour.¹¹ He will respect most convention-patterns, but be quizzical about the value of some of them. He will appreciate the story, quoted by Mr Westwood, of the boy discovered by his housemaster in an impropriety: 'You don't have to worry, sir. It's only a phase.' As a wise confessor will never permit himself a sharp intake of breath whatever he is told, so a sound theologian will not be shocked by phenomena which may appear worse than bizarre to practitioners of other disciplines. Accordingly even the most eccentric homosexual will not prove such an awkward customer to him as to those occupied with the maintenance of public order.

Nor is the isolation of specific intemperance merely an idle academic exercise without bearing on the real situation, for problems are like emergencies, sometimes too large to be taken all in one piece. Whether it be the threat of nuclear warfare, or a torpedo in the boiler room, or just the accumulation of more work than you can manage, then it is practical wisdom to tackle one bit at a time. So also the moral theologian may help by practising a certain economy, and keeping at one stage to the narrow field of temperance.

There the opportunities and possible failures are the same in kind for the homosexual as for everybody else. The only difference is that he cannot hope for and set himself to the climax of sexual concupiscence—here a word without an ugly ring. If 'the only difference' occasions a wry smile, as if one were to say to a caller, 'Yes, Mr Smith is still around, the only difference is that he happens to be upstairs lying dead in bed', then call to mind that heterosexuals, who are no less inflammable though more protected by custom, for long periods or even for ever may have to practise a similar reserve, by reason of religion, decency, or lack of due circumstance, and even in marriage may have to resign themselves to the prospect of no more gratification.

The distinguishing feature of the homosexual is not that in love-making he prefers any peculiar type of bodily stimulus, but that he prefers his own to the opposite sex. Though it is the point to which the criminal law is directed, the major moral problem does not lie

¹¹ 1a-2ae. lxiv, 3.

in the centre of bodily concupiscence, but rather round the fringes. But then, so also does the general problem of chastity itself. It is what ascetical writers are seeking when they speak of the spirit of detachment. St Thomas refers to the metaphorical chastity which will not be dissociated from our pledged love of God, and of the spiritual fornication committed in all unfaithfulness.¹² The matter cannot be limited to the functions of a specialized organ. Most of us fall under the reproach of Jeremias for playing the harlot with many lovers, and we are none the better for doing so sadly, none the less intemperate if instead of fun we find ourselves gnawing at ourselves. Indeed the trouble is less with sex in its narrow sense according to moral theology than with a diffused sentimentality, less with a positive outward act than with a habit of dallying with the *incitamenta concupiscentiae*.¹³ So St Gregory warns us of the self-centredness which follows from unchastity, a possessiveness about persons and things not for their own sake but for their effect on us, a living, as the psychologists say, according to the Pain-Pleasure Principle, not the Reality-Principle. So Aristotle, and St Thomas after him, recognize the childishness of intemperance, the *vitium puerile* which will follow the greed but not assume to responsibility, the 'mine-mine-mine' which spreads from the rudimentary expressions of the baby to the romance and sophistication of later life.

It is in this wider field of temperance that the homosexual exhibits his special disabilities, and also, we may add, his special gifts. The Wolfenden Report focussed attention on his place in the community; at first its recommendations seemed to meet with semi-official approval from Church authorities, but to judge from their second thoughts and from the recent debate in the House of Commons, when the majority against modifying the criminal law was weightier than the arguments used, sentiment has hardened against him. Questions of criminality, however, concern the moral theologian when he is treating of public justice, not of sexuality in terms of temperance, which, as we have indicated, is more a private matter. Here he will be guided by certain rules.

First, he will conclude that it is neither helpful nor true to regard the homosexual as a degenerate or as suffering from a disease. The exclusive direction of sexuality to the opposite sex is not primitive, but due to later factors; homosexual traits lie in the past of most of us, and vestigial manifestations are healthy. Nor does anthropological research support the view that homosexual activities are peculiarly characteristic of decadent civilizations. The male homosexual

¹² 2a-2ae. cli, 2.

¹³ 2a-2ae. cxlii, 2, ad 2.

should be defined negatively; he has the *passiones* of other men, but is not attracted by women. Most men will reckon that thereby he misses much, for better and for worse, but no neurotic symptoms may result. He can sin, and so can others. His sexuality may turn into psychological illness, and so can that of others, and in that event he, like them, will need treatment, not punishment. Still, as was admitted in one of the case-histories, 'Our sex isn't very satisfactory'. It bears no promise of family and children, it offers little prospect of security, for rarely does it set up a companionship for life. In a special way the homosexual knows the tragedy of human loneliness, and if his condition is unalterable then that is all the more reason why he should not be looked at askance or subjected to impertinence.

Should treatment be looked for where there is no illness? As for moral adjustment, it is noteworthy that the type of religion which is invoked as some remedy for the condition is that which emphasizes the phenomena of conversion. Mr Westwood quotes a specialist's tribute to the value of 'inspirational treatment', with the parenthesis, 'interspersed with farm work, forestry, and market gardening'. The need of falling in love goes without saying; only so can the homosexual, and everybody, gather his desires together to be offered like gold, frankincense, and myrrh. For the rest, it may well be that religion can best help the homosexual at the lower level, by utilizing his gifts, which may range from his interest in ecclesiasticism as a hobby to his characteristic qualities of delicacy, consideration, sympathy, all of which are of great pastoral value. Often they get on well with women, and not only because, as one of the cases remarked, 'we like talking about the same subject, namely men'. What religion should provide is the acceptance of vocation, and of a particular Providence working through every detail and nuance of human experience.

So much is written on the subject, but not often is the theological note sounded, of the plain ordinariness of the homosexual condition. Some are born eunuchs, others have made themselves so, none belong to a third sex; there is a division of graces and states, but all belong to the same body. Some years ago there was a horse much in the news called 'Quare Times', usually broadcast with an Irish pronunciation. This article has suggested that we should speak in Latin.