

# Sexual Minorities As A Challenge to

## Christian Fellowship

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*It may be that the following comments will appear to some readers applicable to all 'sexual minorities'. I myself do not so apply them. I have trans-sexuals entirely in mind as I write, and not merely because they tend to be the most seriously discriminated against. However, it is not for me to dictate to others how they should or should not make use of these ideas. If readers wish to see the trans-sexual's dilemma as a paradigm of some larger or even quite different dilemma, then so be it.*

The Open Church Group in Great Britain has been campaigning to persuade homosexuals who "feel separated from their churches because of their nature to reconsider their position and return to the practice of their faith".<sup>1</sup> The problem which the group envisages is a real, though variable one. Attitudes among theologians may be slowly changing (though not all of us would agree that in this field all change is for the good); but, as two American writers on female homosexuality have put it, "Inroads into religious thought and re-evaluation are a slow and cumbersome process. [Lesbians] live in the *now*."<sup>2</sup> It is scarcely sufficient to shrug the shoulders and say "In time, it will all work out". This is not enough for Christian fellowship, because Christian fellowship belongs to the *now*, not to the contingent future.

Attitudes in the Churches which go so far as to deny Christian fellowship to 'sexual minorities' may be reduced to one simple, if generally unrecognized factor: *dread*. Mystery misconceived is dread: it is distracting, *zwiespältig* – dividing the mind against itself, making neutrality impossible. It is the negative side of holy fear: it is what St Paul presumably meant when he warned against the destructive consequences of unworthy communion.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the aetiological reasons which might be adduced in hard clinical fashion to 'explain' what has been called 'sexual deviance', it remains at the end of the day for a great many 'normal' people, and therefore for a great many Christians, an object of *dread*, something which unsettles their security.

Of all such states of being 'trans-sexuality' has a particular tendency to do this, both in the 'abstract' and in those concrete situations where the particular trans-sexual is 'obvious' as such to the beholder. The trans-sexual may well feel:

As to a vagrant star the rocks lean  
Inconsiderately in vacant awe  
Or the dun beetle  
Drones about a lamp,

So do they measure out  
The standing of my life  
In tangents by the rule.

I am to them an object  
Of bad computation,  
Distorting orbits,  
Short-falling echoes of presumption.  
They chew the cud and feel  
Inwardly chill,  
As if a spider through  
The points in their design  
Was ciphering their circuits  
Painlessly.

Nor can they fix the source  
Of their dismay  
For that deep black  
Takes not another dye.

It is worth exploring the biblical perspective on such dread.

One very curious but not often mentioned aspect of the 'difficult' story of Jesus causing the evil spirits in the demoniacs of Gadara to infest a herd of pigs is that the "whole town" turned out to beseech him "to leave the neighbourhood". (*Matt 8:34*) It was simply too embarrassing to have this sort of thing happen in one's neighbourhood, the more so since, by contrast with the curing of the paralytic at Capernaum on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee, which according to the Gospel account happened immediately afterwards and evoked only praise in onlookers, the 'transposing' of the daemons was not simply a humane act but a shaking of fundamental notions about reality. People may even have felt it to be downright immoral. The demoniacs no doubt, were frightening in a superficial sense, but at least people were used to them. The transposing of that familiar horror to the placid pigs was more than they could take; and the same horrified attitude met his curing of the leper. (*Mark 1:40-43*)

Why the difference? Was not the leper helped by an act of kindness just as the blind man restored to sight or the paralytic made to walk? Perhaps, but leprosy itself was a symbol of dread which was not thought of as simply a temporary accident of life but a symbol of some unspeakable horror deeply embedded in the recesses of men's souls. It was something not to be looked at or involved with – like possession. There was simply no point in being 'kind' to either the 'possessed' or the lepers. It was therefore easy for the Pharisees to stop up the first faint trickle of joy at Jesus's healing power by saying: "It is through the prince of devils that he casts out devils". (*Matt 9:34*). There are things which men are challenged to face but which are so overwhelmingly terrifying

for them that it is beyond their available strength to do so. The Holy Spirit is available to them, but they do not fully avail themselves of Him. So Yahweh could say: "I mean to make Jerusalem a stone to be lifted by all the peoples: all who try to lift it will hurt themselves severely". (*Zechariah* 12:3) And so they did – both inside and outside.

All this is sadly applicable to the Christian attitude to 'sexual minorities', especially to those like trans-sexuals who can be 'seen' for 'what they are'. There is a horror evoked by such 'freaks' which is a horror of the gulf at the feet of Everyman, a horror which is becoming less and less easy to suppress in face of the cumulative impression of human vulnerability pressed upon the mind by the reporting of the mass media. In a sense, members of the sexual minorities may be becoming scapegoats for an incipient mass hysteria endemic to the 'global village' situation in which man – certainly Western man – now lives.

Many of those who assume that their common sense tells them of what sex people are and how they should relate sexually to each other may be able to live as 'real' persons only because they have rigorously defined reality within arbitrary limits which their perceptions can cope with. They do not see themselves as ludicrous and are never "crippled by inward laughter" at their own feebleness: on the contrary they move about confidently and effectively – on the surface – in a tidy world.<sup>4</sup> But if once they were to admit the artificiality of their terms of reference they would feel suddenly naked and in need of a fig-leaf. They would succumb at once to what Mother Julian crisply calls "doubtful dread". They may shake their heads at the way homosexuals or trans-sexuals are 'trapped' or 'enslaved' by their 'perversions', or even, if they are consciously more liberal in outlook and therefore not so directly sensitive to the dilemma of which we speak, muse sadly on the misfortune of being so 'psychologically vulnerable'. Yet they themselves may be more deeply trapped than some in the sexual minority itself – trapped in that very short-circuiting which prevents them from opening up to the full leading of the Holy Spirit into personhood, and which only shows itself on the surface as a certain anxiousness without proper object. Well might a member of the minority say:

"I fear the palette sky as Ptolemy the spheres:

I fear the fear which drives the engineers."

Such human attitudes are the context of Christian tradition; for the power of tradition, in human terms, is the power of the communally thinkable, even when its vocabulary and machinery is the brainchild of an élite.

"Always behind you, judges  
Will have something trite to say.  
Let them know you won't delay;

No star's smooth at its edges." 5

This is *one* sense in which *religio* is a *binding* and its adherents, either corporately or representatively, are "leeches of the soul".6

Consider the following case cited in a homosexual study already quoted:

"One Lesbian we know, who belongs to the Assembly of God, confessed her sin during a regular church service. She was immediately dragged to the altar, pushed to her knees and held there. Her fellow Christians gathered round her and prayed over her *en masse*. They railed and chanted and pleaded with God to exorcise the Devil who had taken over her senses. The trauma of that experience was devastating to Joanne. It left an indelible imprint on her psyche. Try as we all have in D.O.B., we have not been able to get Joanne to reinstate herself as a person. She still has terrible fits of depression. Nothing can change her feelings as a Lesbian; likewise, nothing can change her conviction that she is doomed to God's wrath."7

Christians who pressurise in this way in the name of the Gospel or Tradition are like the lascivious elders and their dupes on the Council of the Jews at Babylon in their attitude to Susanna. (*Dan.* 13) The elders demanded of Susanna something intrinsically immoral, and when she refused they denounced her to the Council for something qualitatively the same, knowing that she had no way of proving her innocence, "I am trapped", she said. "Whatever I do. If I agree, that means my death; if I resist, I cannot get away from you. But I prefer to fall innocent into your power than to sin in the eyes of the Lord". (vv 22-23) For those who are not strong-minded, there is a high probability of total or partial brain-washing such as Joanne with her conviction of being under the wrath of God is so sad an instance.

"Those pasty eyes  
Roll out in scabrous zeal,  
Their callow souls affronted  
By this ikon-girl."

There are, of course, always exceptions to a general rule of human behaviour, even in the Church. One theologian in the Catholic tradition, who was at the time in the midst of preparing a book on sexuality and affective relationship, responded to a friend's announcement of 'sex-change' by hastening to express his "support in what must be an exciting, joyful, yet painful transition", even though he confessed candidly that it was something completely outside his experience or theoretical knowledge. But general patterns of reaction are often more striking than individual and unlooked-for expressions which go against those patterns. The patterns are multiple in shape although they always bear a general similarity to each other sufficient to cause the victim to think "I have been here before".

We have already seen an example of the most brutal and simplistic approach, but there can be cases of more psychological sophistication. For instance, we can have the Christian who believes, on some fundamentalist ground, whether Protestant or Catholic, that "if medicine is inspired by the desire to know and obey God's will, it will aim at making women real women, and men real men", and so proceeds to call in this or that brand of psychological medicine as the handmaid of an a priori judgment of what *real* men and women are; to persuade a 'deviant', let us say, to accept that "rebellion against her sex might be rebellion against God" and to "prepare herself for a true acceptance of her sex, so that she could become herself again – a woman".<sup>8</sup> Although a non-fundamentalist group like the Clinical Theology Association might avoid such simple-mindedness when dealing with homosexuality, it would not necessarily do so when dealing with trans-sexuality, the state which always, in the end, loses out from all points of view.

It is sometimes imagined that if one affirms the transcendence of charity and refrains from judgmental language one is on the right lines in relations with sexual minorities. This is by no means necessarily true. Kindness based upon an abstract idea of Christian love can sometimes be almost as damaging as aggression. Attempts, for instance, are sometimes made to deflect the homosexual or transsexual into some other imagined 'vocation' thought to be more congenial (and convenient) to church tradition, on an assumption that it is something to which the person's 'unusual' personality has some affinity. A homosexual may thus be steered in the direction of a monastic community (at least he or she will be more or less 'out of harm's way' there, and monasteries are, after all, almost by definition, mono-sexual) or the prison service. A male-to-female transsexual may be urged to consider the ministry as an appropriate mode of 'spiritual maternity' as an alternative to overt 'sex-change'.<sup>9</sup> It is not realised that such counsel, well-meant though it may be, is at best no kinder or more dignified than the notion of 'women's work' against which Women's Liberation is now fighting and at worst may be akin to the classification of blacks as 'Sons of Ham' fit only to draw water and hew wood. Each spiritual gift and each calling of God "has its own specific calibre and measure in power, in grace and in usefulness" proportioned to the person for whom God intends it: one has no right to squeeze someone else into a ready-made 'vocation' simply because it is a convenient way of avoiding an embarrassing situation. It can be excruciatingly painful when a personal friend takes the cowardly line of least resistance.

"The Tragedy is in the patten wrought  
By friendship, the tides seasons make  
Grown high indelicately with the Ides." <sup>10</sup>

It is the cup of friendly hemlock, the more bitter because "it is not

an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour: for then I could have borne it". (*Psalms* 55:12)

The problem of authority and fellowship becomes more acute where the Christian community concedes its governance to a magistratum whose word is seen as uniquely binding on the conscience. This may involve a highly systematised structure as in Roman Catholicism, Christian Science or the Jehovah's Witnesses, habitual constitutional process as in Anglicanism or sacramental-spiritual direction as in Orthodoxy; but often the effects are indistinguishable from each other irrespective of vocabulary or mode of transmission, except perhaps in degree.

One example must suffice. It concerns a 'male-to-female' transsexual, someone thoroughly committed in faith within her church tradition, to which she had come after great travail and at considerable cost. Her bishop's first reaction, not transmitted directly but through a third party, was to throw doubt upon the general soundness of her belief in terms of the Church's tradition. After some exchange of letters it became clear to him that this view could not be sustained. Nevertheless, he felt himself to have an insuperable problem, which was summed up in a letter of February 1975:

"If I thought my attitude results from a personal theology or from personal prejudice I would suggest bringing your problem into the open in discussion with theologians and bishops, but I have no doubt whatsoever about the issue of such colloquium. I cannot prevent you from going your way but I have no right to accept this way ... You will have to resort to "spiritual communion" in lieu of sacramental communion. I do appreciate your loyalty ... but this is all I can do."

A short while before this our transsexual, whom we will call 'X', had received a letter from a priest closely associated with Bishop 'Y' addressed to her female name, in which the writer said:

"I do understand all the trials you are going through, and am praying for you."

He promised to speak with the Bishop on his return from a long trip abroad.

Another priest (overseas and unconnected with the Bishop), whom 'X' had never met but with whom she had struck up a close spiritual friendship during the previous two years, had meanwhile written in more forthright terms:

"My experience has taught me that the displeasure of one bishop in the Church can never threaten one's standing in the Church ... only a priest may have problems as to the future of his orders, but a bishop cannot touch a layman ... We must never let a bishop shake us when we know we are in the centre of God's perfect will ... Remember ... you are no longer a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow citizen with the saints of the household of God ... Exercise your prerogatives ..."

This was all very well, but the extent to which one could exercise one's prerogatives when so categorically condemned by one's bishop were necessarily limited. Physical presence and passive participation at church might be all that one could manage.

The first of these two priests did, in the event, speak to the bishop in question but then wrote as follows:

"Dear – (Male name!)

All I can do is pray. It is extremely difficult for me to go against the decision of my spiritual director, though I don't agree with him on many points ..."

In later letters, this priest could do no more than commend 'X' to the uncovenanted mercies of God. At least, however, he reverted to her female name after a while, realising, perhaps, that there was not the slightest chance of 'reversion'. 'X' meanwhile wrote to a third priest who was a very noted confessor and spiritual director, asking if he could intercede. Father S replied in July 1975 in some bewilderment:

"Unfortunately your case was not foreseen in all the age-old experience of the Church, and therefore I do not see any course of action for you except to follow the direction of your Bishop."

In October 1975 'X' finally succeeded in having her own meeting with Bishop 'Y'. The meeting was cordial, the Bishop showing a quiet and evidently quite heartfelt concern for her own and her family's well-being. He made no attempt to discuss the theological or canonical issues, merely offering to pray about the whole situation. Meanwhile the ban was to continue. 'X' informed a close priest-friend of this meeting and he replied:

"It is very good that you have had a personal talk with Bishop 'Y'. Even though he may still not agree with you about the rightness of what you have done, yet surely he may come to the point where he feels able to readmit you to communion. He gave his ruling, so I understand, before you had finally taken a decision ... Now that you have made your decision, standing before God in your conscience ... there is obviously a different situation; and Bishop 'Y' will surely take that into account."

Father K's assumption proved not to be justified. Bishop 'Y' was completely silent until July 1976, in spite of two friendly reminders from 'X'. When finally he wrote, he was more rigid in his judgment than before. He disclosed that he had written two earlier notes in reply to 'X's reminders but had refrained from posting them in case they should seem unduly "cruel". The Church "as a spiritual entity", he declared, could not accept her presuppositions. Had she wished to commend herself to him "as a person sick in mind" he might have acted differently. But she had sought to justify her action by rational and theological argument. This was

“either insane or spiritual beguilement”. While not wishing to maintain that ‘X’ was “no Christian”, he must certainly deny her the right to call herself a faithful member of the Church. Of course, she could take it to a higher level if she wished, but he guaranteed in advance that the response would be officially negative all the way down the line. The picture was painfully clear. Bishop ‘Y’ was deliberately putting ‘X’ on the defensive. “If you want to fight, fight”, he was saying. But ‘X’ did not want to fight: this was the very antithesis of how she wanted to stand in relation to the Church: the very last thing she wanted was to be cast in the role of an heresiarch.

In total contrast to the Bishop’s attitude was that of the priest who had written so encouragingly from afar in 1974. He now wrote:

“I must admit I don’t understand everything that “gender re-assignment” involves and means. It is an area in which I am not versed. The whole thing still mystifies me and I regard myself least qualified to make even a passing comment ... The Lord ‘is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us’. No one needs to admonish you to make certain that you are in the centre of God’s perfect will. You are ‘of age’ and need no one to direct you to stay in obedience to God’s ordinances ... May the Father of glory continue to minister to your physical and spiritual needs in the power of His Holy Spirit and prepare you as a ‘vessel fit for His use and unto every good work’.”

This letter was the more striking for two reasons: first that Fr E confessed himself in other contexts a conservative of conservatives; and second that a much earlier letter written when he was totally ignorant of ‘X’s problem of gender-identity, had used precisely the same imagery, in somewhat prophetic manner, of a ‘vessel fit for His use’. The perspectives of Bishop Y and Father E could scarcely have been more different though their ‘doctrine’ was the same.

The year 1976 passed into 1977 with no further development. ‘X’ attended Church occasionally, spoke to no one, did not, of course, receive communion nor go to confession, but continued her way utterly convinced of who she was (for her it was not so much a ‘change of sex’ as an ‘acceptance of permanent gender’) and equally determined to continue her work as a theologian in her church tradition, whatever her Bishop might feel bound to say. At the beginning of Lent 1977, she wrote a note to the Bishop asking him to pray for her especially with the approach of the Feast of Resurrection and declaring that it would still be her greatest joy to be able to make her confession to him at Easter and receive communion from his hands. Back came the reply:

“As I told you earlier, if it had been a matter of recognising



mental and physiological sickness in you I might have been more lenient, making sure, however, that 'charity' does not lead to 'scandal'. It is your very insistence on your sickness being part of a 'transcendental scheme' which makes it impossible for me to do more than be sad and distressed at your spiritual condition; I am not refusing you communion in vindictiveness, but because I believe that you are in a state of spiritual beguilement; if you were aware of this, the Sacraments of the Church could be a help to heal your spiritual illness, but not unless it is recognized as such by you. Even in this event, I would not give you communion in public, as I know the horror it would cause among ... believers (you are never mistaken for a woman by anyone, and there is among the people who meet you a general sense of revulsion)."

It is needless here to quote 'X's reply except in one particular:

"I experience little deaths of my belief in and love for God every time one of your 'normal' people shows 'revulsion'. If only for a moment, everything meaningful drains away into a distant 'black hole'. It comes back, of course, because my understanding is capable of putting these attitudes to me into proportion: my self-awareness is 'reconstituted' and, perhaps only a few seconds after the crisis, I am praising God or praying for those who have shown their scorn and revulsion. But these little deaths demonstrate to me what the big, definitive, death to God must be like."

#### *The limitations of tradition and church authority*

There are perhaps two transcendent realities which in their nature are especially incapable of being required to be believed in by church authority: God and oneself. These as Newman memorably affirmed are the two luminously evident realities in anyone's consciousness by comparison with everything else. If we were altogether unable to discover some meaning for the word 'God' from our immediate experience, no amount of affirmation by the Church could convince us. The same is true of our own being and nature, irrespective of what logicians may do with hypothetical cases of brain transplant and cellular reconstitution. Indeed it is necessary to know ourselves, in an ontological as distinct from a moral sense, before we can possibly know God. Even formal philosophical analysis, although better able than the Church could ever be to affirm to us these fundamentals of reality, stops short at generality to be inferred and, hopefully, applied. At the end of the day, we are dependent for our certainty both of ourselves and of God upon a simple, unanalysable, intuition, which we may simply have to say is the work of grace through the indwelling Spirit, and leave it at that.<sup>1 2</sup> For the Church, or Tradition, or Christian Community, to assert that this or that person is a man or a woman is to assert a fundamental truth in the form of a derived or dependent

truth and the result is meaningless. External authority cannot adjudicate on a person's personhood, and therefore cannot adjudicate on a person's gender, because this is a matter of 'total knowing' in which the truth impresses itself on the mind through direct encounter with reality, not through abstract 'first principles' or a multiplicity of particulars. It was because Pope John XXIII saw this so clearly in respect of fundamental 'human rights', and therefore set out his encyclical *Pacem in terris* in terms not of abstract natural law from which the personal was derived but of personhood as immediate reality self-justifying and capable of itself perceiving 'nature', that he did not and could not think of the Second Vatican Council as a dogmatising body.<sup>13</sup> All efforts by ecclesiastical authority or Christian community to define the bounds of personhood is therefore, in effect, a surrender to idolatry and a flight from the 'Living God';<sup>14</sup> and for authority or community to demand the consent of the will in such matters in the long term is to threaten some individuals at least with a destruction of all capacity for joy and love.<sup>15</sup>

"The more we aim at universality of experience the less we grasp or even feel", and to the extent that the Tradition of which we are a part, through our passivity, manages to reduce fundamental phenomena to abstract formulae or conventional reflex it loses real understanding and experience. "The mansion of Christ has no room for spurious reality, for the cleanliness of idealism, turning in upon itself in despair". Nor has it for the crudity of brute social assertion. Ecclesiastical tradition, however much it may enclose the presence of the Living God among His people, is always teetering on the edge of becoming a "structure of dread", and those who climb its dizzy ladders may well experience a sudden and unexpected vertigo upon discovering that a vital rung is actually missing.<sup>16</sup>

It may be that the situations with which we are here concerned provide an ideal object-lesson in how Christian corporality can unconsciously substitute for the actual realisation of love, righteousness, perfection and divine likeness a conventional, symbolic, rhetorical and doctrinal approximation, and in the process render true transfiguration almost impossible.<sup>17</sup> The Church can thus come close to evacuating its sacramental character and create a well-nigh "overwhelming presupposition" against itself no matter how theoretically plausible its credentials.<sup>18</sup> If the Church presumes upon the clarity of the Kingdom in this 'Middle Time' it must always be in danger of turning man into an automaton of virtue or vice, "deprived of beneficent, gracious and life-giving energy," and give falsity "an almost dogmatic significance."<sup>19</sup>

#### *The meaning of being deprived of Church fellowship*

Ultimately the only objective meaning which trans-sexuals could claim for their condition (I cannot speak of other sexual

minorities) would be in terms of how they stand with God. The word *consciousness*, after all, comes from *conscire*, 'to know *with*'. Only *with* God can any person assume reality. It follows from this that even if fellowship (*koinonia*) is denied with men, a trans-sexual can still see himself or herself as a *person* (*prosopon* not *hypostasis*) possessing meaning in theandric relation to Christ, "for whom all men were formed so that He might be formed in them".<sup>20</sup> This knowledge saves the trans-sexual from a sense of ultimate futility, but at the cost of perhaps finding that the very life on earth which has been so costingly affirmed becomes, as it were, fictitious and dispensable. The prayer of St Symeon the New Theologian to the Holy Spirit then becomes desperately real:

"Come thou who has separated me from all and hast made me lonely in this world and who thyself art become desire in me."<sup>21</sup>

It is some consolation, although not much, to remember that one could have said this prayer just as much as an 'undisclosed trans-sexual' moving unrebuked around the World and the Church as one might say it as a disclosed and consequently ostracised trans-sexual.

Of the two isolations, interior and exterior, the latter is by far the worse if it affects one's standing in the Church. The Church is the "free place of the Spirit, where true persons are seen face to face in the light of God's action in history",<sup>22</sup> that society in and through which alone man as person in the image of God can express his true life in Christ and realise his 'likeness'.<sup>23</sup> the only context in which man is truly "free from all external necessity".<sup>24</sup> Just as the paralytic at the pool of Bethsaida was, in a manner of speaking, cut off from the here-and-now effect of God's covenanted grace by not having anyone to carry him to the water, so a man or woman isolated from ecclesial communion is by this very fact to some degree deprived of the "power and full assistance of God himself".<sup>25</sup> In the last analysis, of course, in the perspective of the Kingdom, such a person will *not* be lost as a result of anything so fortuitous; but nonetheless it will be *as if* that person were *not alive in time*. It is in the Easter confession of faith and penitence that Christians "get back their life", in the common sharing of the Pasch, in the common cup, that they live the resurrection hope as the Church. By exclusion from the sacraments the trans-sexual could not even embody a confession that, in some mysterious way, although not itself sinful, his or her condition or being, represented the totality of sin and alienation in God's benighted world. By refusing the sacraments, the Church's leadership, and indeed any part of the fellowship which consciously abetted the leadership in its stand, would render the trans-sexual morally irresponsible in a sense which he or she does not necessarily *wish* to be irresponsible.

The Church stands, or should stand, for that unconditional sharing of the burden of the Fall which Ioanniky the Great represented when he placed his hands on the head of a girl said to be possessed and uncompromisingly declared: "By the power of the living God, I, his unworthy servant Ioanniky, take upon myself your sin, *if you have sinned* ... because my shoulders are stronger than yours, because I want to accept your trial for the sake of love".<sup>26</sup>

There is, moreover, such a degree of correspondence between personhood and communion that denial of the one threatens death to the other. Personality presupposes another, says Berdyaev, not in the sense of a "not-self" but in the sense of another person with whom there can be communion.<sup>27</sup> Indeed on the basis of the New Testament witness one might be justified in saying that our personhood is necessary to the meaning of the Eucharist and *vice versa*. (*Gal 3:28; 2 Cor 11:2; Ephesians 2:15*).<sup>28</sup> It is of course true that a person who receives the eucharistic Christ in sin or wilfulness not only "dwells in darkness" but brings down darkness upon the universe in some degree, and for this reason it would be perfectly within the pastoral duty of the clergy to deny the Sacrament to any trans-sexual (or homosexual) who showed clear evidence of persistence in this or that manner of life in spite of a lack of clear inner conviction of doing right, for in that case it might reasonably be feared that the person was simply indulging the flesh. But where such a person acts explicitly and consistently upon a reasoned and 'transcendental' basis, either that person is in good faith – and not therefore falling under St Paul's judgment in this matter – or so evil that the Sacrament may as well be given and the Lord's judgment allowed to take its course; for either way, the Church's judgment has no more relevance.

The clergy must certainly ponder very carefully indeed before denying the sacraments in such circumstances as these, for to do so to those who in true penitence and faith reach out to Christ both cuts off a "living particle" from the visible Body and possibly impedes the growth of that Body.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, to deny communion to one who is committed in faith to a life of suffering is to deny the Church a degree of access to the liberation of that "ascending force". On all these counts, those who deny the sacraments incur judgment, however saintly they may be, for none are wholly blameless, even the saints.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this is a case for St Ignatius of Antioch's little-headed dictum that the bishop should keep silence as an image of God's abysmal sovereignty and grace.<sup>31</sup> Patience and humility, on all sides, may be necessary in face of apparent discordance in case a new theme is in the offing. Otherwise the Spirit's voice may be rejected by the very choir which is singing his praises.

After I had written the above, I came across this striking con-

firmation of my view: "To be cut off from the local church, through which one belongs to Christ's Kingdom, a Kingdom which is strong in his victory over evil, is to fall back in all one's weakness, into the power of the kingdom of darkness".<sup>3 2</sup>

- 1 *Church Times*, 25 March 1977.
- 2 Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, (New York 1972) p 35.
- 3 Cf Wilhelm Stählin, *The Mystery of God*, (London 1937) p 124.
- 4 Cf David Martin, in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 June 1975.
- 5 Elizabeth Jennings, *Collected Poems 1967*, (London 1967) p 159.
- 6 Cf David Martin, "Doctors of the mind or leeches of the soul?" in *The Times Education Supplement*, 1 August 1975.
- 7 Martin and Lyon op cit p 29.
- 8 Thus Paul Tournier, *The Healing of Persons*, (London 1966) pp 130-1. See the doctor's advice cited by Nicholas Mason in *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol 6, No 2 (June 1980) pp 86-7.
- 9 The present writer has been the recipient of such advice.
- 10 Roger Airey, *Hows Oxford*, (Sevenoaks, 1975) p 8.
- 11 This case has been documented from private correspondence.
- 12 Cf James P Mackey, *Life and Grace: an Essay in Basic Theology*, (Dublin 1966), pp 48-9, 99.
- 13 Stanley E Kutz CSB "Conscience and Contraception" in Justus Lawlor (ed.) *Contraception and Holiness*, (London 1965) pp 27-28. Kutz sees this as the reason why *Pacem in terris* was uniquely, among encyclicals, meaningful to men of the most "divergent convictions".
- 14 Cf Antony Snell SSM, *Truth in Words*, (London 1965) p 25; Laurence Bright O P, in introduction to Giles Hibbert O P *Man, Culture and Christianity*, (London 1967).
- 15 T S M Dubay, "The Psychological Possibility of Intellectual Obedience", *Review of Religions*, Vol 1. 19 (1960) pp 67-76.
- 16 Cf Sister Thekla in Mother Maria Gysi (ed.) *Orthodox Potential: Collected Essays*, (Newport Pagnell, 1973) pp17-26.
- 17 Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, (London 1938) p 312.
- 18 W G Peck, *From Chaos to Catholicism*, (London 1909) p 123.
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