

ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON  
2121 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE  
BRIGHTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02135

OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL

June 10, 1975

Reverend and dear Father:

I am writing to you at this time about the delicate moral issue of homosexuality. As you know, this question is being discussed widely today and many of the positions being taken are contributing to some confusion both within civil society and the Church. Some organized lobbies are urging city councils and state legislatures to revamp legislation which they see as discriminatory in jobs and housing. Some people are even asking if a homosexual can remain a practicing Catholic.

The Bishops' Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices has taken this matter under serious consideration. They have prepared for distribution to priest-confessors a booklet which deals with the moral and pastoral problems of people who are homosexuals. Even though this booklet is not an official document of the Bishops' Conference, I am pleased to forward a copy of it to you with this letter.

I want to take this opportunity to make it clear that the Church in her teaching has always considered homosexual activity, whether in thought or deed, to be objectively sinful. Catholic tradition teaches that the use of genital sexuality is objectively good only when it is between man and woman, within marriage, significative and causative of conjugal love and open to procreation. By their very nature, homosexual acts exclude all possibility of the transmission of life. Hence they cannot fulfill the procreative purpose of the sexual faculty. As you know, the Judaeo-Christian Heritage, reflected from the beginning in Sacred Scripture, has repeatedly rejected this behavior as immoral (Lv 20.13; Rm 1.27; 1Cor 6.9-10; 1Tm 1.9-10; Lv 18.22).

The Christian spiritual tradition places this phenomenon in a broader perspective. All human beings are born into this world in a sinful condition. Because of this, we find disharmony in our lives. Our relationships with God, with ourselves, with one another, and with all material creation have gone awry. We experience competing and conflicting drives within us: some lead to healthy initiative and others to destructive aggression. Moreover, our minds are darkened and our wills are weakened. Each of us experiences this burdensome heritage of original sin in a uniquely different way. All of us know some

RCAB 00675

disorientation in life and some inclination to sin (Rm. 7:15).

Because we are free, we can increase this disorientation within ourselves by our personal decisions to yield to desires and drives that lead us to sin and self-imprisonment and away from God and from wholesome relationships with others. Personal sin strengthens the grip that the consequences of original sin already have on us.

Through conversion, faith and baptism we are incorporated into an intimate sharing in God's saving life. God pledges his healing and sustaining graces to disoriented humanity. The spiritual journey which is the Christian life, is ordinarily the slow and gradual process of cooperating with God's grace in his call to greater wholeness and holiness. We often sense that the drives within us can become chaotic and indeed overpowering if they are not submitted to healing grace in repentance, in spiritual direction and in spiritual counseling.

In our sinful condition, virtue comes hard. It is indeed difficult to embark on this spiritual journey and to continue in fidelity to it. God's grace makes it possible to tread the path; the support of others who are sympathetic and strengthening make the path easier to tread. In the experience of this journey we come to appreciate more and more how to respect and love the body which St. Paul calls "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1Cor 6:19) and to subject it to the law of Christ through Christian asceticism.

When we have occasion to minister to people beset by problems relating to homosexuality, it is important for us as priests to help them properly to evaluate their experiences. Some have the incorrect impression that the mere presence of emotional feelings and desires is in itself sinful. This can lead the homosexual to further depression, discouragement and radical self-doubt. We want to help him or her understand that simply to have these feelings and desires, even though they may be a source of temptation, is not necessarily sinful. We do want to encourage him or her to bring his or her wounded humanity to God for healing.

It is important to realize that in some instances they may be the victims of these innate tendencies for which they are not personally responsible. In other instances homosexual drives may be consequent upon acquired experience of homosexual relations. In still other cases for whatever reason, those who report homosexual problems may have been exposed to unhealthy influences in which homosexual drives, which might otherwise have been avoided, have been artificially stimulated. In dealing with the problem of homosexuality in his pastoral ministry the priest must, for his own proper orientation, estimate the degree of subjective guilt which his penitent may have previously incurred. Having done this he should strive prudently to develop in his penitent a constructive and hopeful outlook, neither minimizing the difficulty of overcoming established habits, nor encouraging a defeatist attitude which would strengthen the penitent's attachment for the objective evil of homosexual relationships.

Even as we try to help such people understand and accept their feelings, we do not want to concur in any conviction that fostering these desires or entering into overt homosexual behavior is a normal and moral expression of sexuality for them. We will not ultimately help them by allowing ourselves to give tacit or explicit support to any homosexual thought or deed. However, sometimes when homosexuality goes beyond mere temptation, lack of appropriate knowledge and diminished inner freedom can reduce personal responsibility in yielding to desires and entering into overt behavior. We want to offer sympathetic understanding for this condition. Yet, we also must support the desire and the effort to move under God's healing grace to greater freedom through deeper conversion of heart and the sincere practice of christian asceticism. It is important that the confessor or spiritual director always offer hope in the power of God's grace. We must not encourage people to remain trapped in what is considered to be only objectively evil behavior. Our desire ought to be to help them, as we do all Christians, to aspire to chaste love of themselves and others. Our model is Christ the Lord, whose response was always compassionate love with total resistance to sin, any sin.

It is being said by some today that in the past, homosexual or bisexual people have not always experienced comfort and strength from some of those associated with the Church. Regardless of what may be said, I am writing to encourage you to real empathy in your ministry to them, while reaffirming once again the authentic teaching of the Church in this area. In many ways, the example and pastoral concern of chaste and loving celibate priests can be a sign of hope for them that "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk. 1.37).

With prayerful best wishes, and a hearty blessing, I am

Devotedly yours in Christ,

*+ Humbert Cardinal Meseron*

Archbishop of Boston