



CARDINAL'S RESIDENCE  
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BRIGHTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02135

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His Eminence  
Franjo Cardinal Seper  
Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
Il Piazza del S. Uffizio  
Roma, 00193 (Vatican City)

Your Eminence:

I wish to acknowledge your letter of November 14, 1978 concerning the matter of Reverend Paul Shanley and his tapes in which he presents doctrine directly opposed to the teaching of the Church. Because this matter involves a serious pastoral problem which confronts the Church in the United States at this time, I have decided to reply at some length and after some serious reflection on my part and to present my reply in person at the Sacred Congregation.

I wish to place my answer to your questions in its fullest pastoral context and also to give to the Holy See the fullest awareness of how I, as a pastor, see this problem and how I have tried to face it. At the beginning of this letter, I will explain my general overall response to this serious problem and then I will answer your questions more directly.

I. General Context of Homosexuality as a Pastoral, Spiritual and Moral Problem in Large Urban Areas of the United States

The following points confront me as a pastor:

There is a widespread homosexual culture especially, although not exclusive among young people. But there is a relatively new element present. This new element is found in the fact that homosexuals band together to assert: (1) the open fact of their homosexuality, (2) the fact that this is of no consequence to anyone except themselves - thus to be a homosexual differs from having a heterosexual orientation as being right handed differs from being left handed, and (3) the strong efforts to secure their civil rights and human rights.

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From the Church, some of these are asking: (1) that they be ministered to as a group and (2) that they be admitted to seminaries and novitiates. It is often asserted that in the past the Church has condemned the condition of homosexuality as in itself sinful. Implicit and sometimes explicit is the assertion that homosexual acts and behaviour constitute a morally acceptable way of life. It is my belief that the very fact of banding together in such groups for social and religious purposes usually includes the recognition and even the fostering of homosexual activity. All of these elements which are widespread throughout the United States are intensified in the Archdiocese of Boston because of two factors: (1) We are largely urbanized and (2) We have the largest concentration of young people in the world due to the great number of colleges and universities flourishing here.

There is one final, significant factor which though not widespread is especially ominous for the life of the Church. Affected by the above elements a few priests are beginning to proclaim their own homosexuality and an even larger number is beginning to foster the assertions and claims outlined above. In addition, some priests are said to assert that homosexual acts under certain conditions are not sinful.

## II. General Response

I have felt an obligation to respond to the root of this problem without, however, neglecting to respond to its symptoms as well. First, may I indicate my efforts to get at the root of the problem.

### Priestly Formation

Since our seminaries reflect the local American culture, the problem of homosexuality has surfaced there in a manner which is widespread and quite deep. It has even been asserted by some seminary faculty members that the Church does not have the right to inquire into the lives of candidates for the priesthood in a penetrating way. Such a philosophy, which is an illicit expansion of American political philosophy, would paralyze the Church in its mission of calling only true vocations to the priesthood. In response to this:

- (1) I have worked with seminary priests towards a complete transformation of our admission process to the college seminary and to the theologate.

(2) I have also worked to strengthen the evaluation process by which men are voted on towards the priesthood.

(3) I have encouraged the spiritual directors of our seminary to work in the internal forum - always respecting proper confidentiality - to exercise their influence to remove from the path to the priesthood young men who are homosexuals.

(4) I have also sent at regular intervals outstanding priests to be prepared for the delicate work of spiritual direction.

The danger in seminaries, Your Eminence, is obvious. Where large numbers of homosexuals are present in a seminary, other homosexuals are quickly attracted. Other healthier young men tend to be repelled. As a result of the efforts in our seminary, a large number of candidates have been dropped. Yet some of these, who are from other dioceses, have been transferred by their bishops to other seminaries despite complete disclosures from our seminary.

As a result of my actions and the cooperation of some of our faculty, the numbers to be ordained in our Archdiocese for the next several years will be small. Had we not taken these actions, a large number of active homosexual men would have been ordained. In this, as you know, I have only been following the requirements of the Holy See in its teaching on priestly formation. We have a seminary which has now - within a five-year period - become almost fully transformed into a community of healthy, well-balanced young men. Our numbers are much smaller but now we will attract more young men who will be the right kind of candidates.

Naturally, there has been criticism for our actions. But I am convinced that these actions were correct. I am also convinced that there are other seminaries where this problem has not begun to be faced. In order to attack this problem at its root, I am now working with some bishops in our Region to compose a letter to all seminaries in the United States and Europe where the bishops of New England send young men to prepare for the priesthood. While there are several foundational areas treated in this letter, the following are especially pertinent to your inquiry and to the issues as outlined above:

(1) The teaching of moral theology in the seminary especially as it relates to the Magisterium. We are trying to strengthen the place given to Magisterial teaching by theology professors, especially by teachers of moral theology.

(2) In this letter, we are trying to strengthen the admissions procedures in several ways. We are saying quite explicitly that homosexuals should not be admitted to the seminary.

(3) We are trying to strengthen the core of trained spiritual directors as I have found this necessary for many reasons - but especially helpful in weeding out overt or latent homosexuals.

(4) We are strengthening the means and also the criteria through which seminarians are evaluated each year.

I believe this letter which is based on and draws heavily from the teaching of the Holy See can have an enormous effect over the next generation of priests formed in New England. We believe it will bring about more orthodox moral teaching, less priests who are inclined to foster and encourage the rising homosexual culture (at least where its demands contradict Church teaching) and that we can turn back the number of homosexuals who, for many reasons, are being drawn towards the sacred priesthood.

I hope that this document which is also addressed to vocation directors will also be helpful to our National Conference as it draws up new five-year guidelines for seminary formation within the next few years.

I also took one other significant step within the last year which I believe is related to this matter. I was approached by one of our priests who has been on a Leave of Absence for about seven years asking if he could return to active ministry. I made an investigation which indicated to me that this priest has been living in a homosexual relationship with another man for a large part of those years. He proclaimed that this was over and that, through a Charismatic Prayer Group, he had experienced a conversion. I felt that to receive him back could create scandal and would undermine the slow but steady reform I was trying to lead in the seminary. So, despite pressure, I refused to receive him back until he had sought spiritual direction and counselling over a five-year period under my direction. He refused to do this. He was refused permission by some other dioceses but - unfortunately I believe - was accepted by a neighboring diocese.

May I say that I always try to be compassionate and helpful to a priest who finds himself to be a homosexual but who wishes to live a life of chastity and who struggles to do good priestly work.

III. Efforts Made in the Archdiocese of Boston to Insure Proper Pastoral Action on Questions of Sexual Ethics

(1) In 1975, the Bishops' Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices released a paper entitled, Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality. I found this paper to be sound and helpful. I immediately mailed it to all the priests of the Archdiocese of Boston. Working with two theologians and a priest psychiatrist, I also prepared a letter to all our priests in which I tried to set down some further principles on this urgent question. I have enclosed a copy of my letter dated June 10, 1975 and also a copy of the document from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

(2) In 1977, the Holy See issued "Humana Persona", a document which gave the authentic Church teaching on a broad range of questions concerned with sexual ethics. The document asked individual ordinaries to prepare further teaching which would apply the principles in "Humana Persona" to their local situation. In response to this request, I immediately set about to write a Pastoral Letter entitled, Growing Together in Holiness. I consulted several theologians during the writing of this letter as I always do on such matters. A copy of my Pastoral Letter is enclosed.

(3) In general, my Pastoral Letter along with the Document from your Congregation, was well received in this Archdiocese. I did, however, receive some sharp criticism because I was not lenient enough. I have enclosed an exchange of correspondence which I received from one Franciscan priest which will point out to Your Eminence the unfortunate thinking which I find among some priests and which indicates that they base their position more on the currents of our culture than on revelation and Church teaching.

(4) I am sure that you are familiar with the recent study of the Catholic Theological Society of America on sexual ethics. As you know, this study treats questions of sexual ethics in a manner which is opposed to Catholic teaching. In order to counteract its approach as quickly as possible, I took the following two steps:

a) I asked Bishop Thomas J. Riley (now deceased) to write a theological critique for our Archdiocesan newspaper. Bishop Riley was a respected moral theologian who taught in our seminary for many years and later served as rector. A copy of this article from The Pilot, July 1, 1977, is enclosed.

b) I, myself, wrote a Pastoral Letter concerning this study in which I tried to attack its basic foundation. This letter also addressed another question which was receiving a great deal of publicity at that time. A copy is enclosed. It also appeared in the enclosed pamphlet entitled, Questions and Answers for Our Times.

Having now given to your Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith my basic efforts on the broad and difficult question of homosexuality as a pastoral, moral and spiritual problem, I am happy to respond to your questions in a direct way.

IV. Efforts Made by me to Confront Directly the Work of Reverend Paul Shanley

When I assumed the office of Archbishop of Boston in 1970, Father Paul Shanley came to see me. He had been working with young people who were so-called "runaways" with the permission of the late Cardinal Cushing. I did not remove him from this work. Neither did I at anytime assign him in any direct way to work with homosexuals or with the so-called "homosexual community". There are no letters in our files to this effect nor did I ever write any such letter.

When reports reached me that he was teaching in ways that seemed contradictory to the teaching of the Church, I immediately summoned him. I have met with him privately at least five times. I have told him what the allegations were and he has denied them. He has told me that he does not teach against what the Church teaches. I have been very specific in my questions and he has responded quite directly. On one occasion, I have called in to our meeting three other priests - one a moral theologian, one a spiritual theologian who is a respected and very orthodox spiritual director at our seminary, and one who is a widely-known and respected priest-psychiatrist. All four of us, working as a panel, addressed Father Shanley with direct questions. Many other questions were concerned with the morality of homosexual acts. He assured us that he spoke only according to Church teaching and that he did not violate it or encourage others to violate it.

V. What Will be Done in the Future Concerning Father Shanley

I trust that the above presentation answers the first part of your question - namely, What has been done in the past to deal with Father Shanley as well as positions which he allegedly espouses?

Now, however, I have been apprised by your letter that the Holy See has found him to be still teaching in a way that is directly opposed to the Holy See. So I feel obliged to answer your second question - namely, What do I plan to do in the future on this matter?

It is my intention to send a letter to all our priests relative to this question. I will re-state in a brief manner the teachings of the Church on matters of homosexuality and refer the priests to recent documents of the Holy See, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and my own office. More to the

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point, I will indicate that no priest is assigned by me to work specifically or only with homosexuals. I will indicate that whatever confusion may have arisen on it in the past, no priest in the future will have the right to make that claim. I will urge all our priests to minister to any homosexual person with kindness but will teach again that the best way of affirming that person is to lead him or her to the following of Christ and the avoidance of homosexual acts or the so-called "homosexual culture".

Recently, an organization called "Dignity" mailed to all our priests a piece of literature which would be destructive if followed and which supports the activity of the gay liberation movement and tries to enlist priests in behalf of that movement - a movement which, as I indicated above, holds positions which could be destructive of Church life and which are held under a veneer of seeking full rights within the Church and also within civil society. A copy is enclosed entitled, An Introductory Letter to Religious and Clerics by Brother William Roberts. Also enclosed is a copy of an editorial which appeared on page 1 of Dignity's Cross Currents, Vol. 1, No. 2. This letter from the organization called "Dignity" will give me a good occasion to write a brief letter indicating my position and the position of the Church and mentioning the fact that no one priest is assigned to this apostolate.

Now, I wish to tell you about my recent meeting with Father Paul Shanley. I called Father Shanley to my office and met with him in early January of 1979. I told him that he was to take a regular parish assignment, that he was not to work with homosexuals, and that his teaching was confusing people and giving them ideas contrary to Church teaching. Father Shanley, as always, said that he was not teaching against what the Church teaches. However, what I want to indicate most of all is that shortly after our meeting, Father Shanley went to the press. He had an extended interview with the Boston Globe and I have enclosed a copy of that report. Father Shanley was also interviewed at length on a WEEI local radio station program. His loudest protest was that homosexuality as an orientation was not a sin and that he would continue to proclaim that to the rooftops. Of course, the Church has never said that it was sinful but that homosexual acts are sinful. It is on this subject of homosexual acts that Father Shanley presents confusing and distorted teaching.

I believe that Father Shanley is a troubled priest and I have tried to be understanding and patient with him while continuously affirming - both privately to him and publicly to my people - the Church teaching on sexual ethics. Finally, in an effort to cooperate with your findings, I have taken these difficult but necessary steps. I hope and pray that you will find them appropriate and wise.

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I trust, Your Eminence, that I have given you a complete picture of this delicate matter. When I have completed my letter to priests in another month or two, I will forward a copy to you.

Please pray for Father Shanley and for all our young people whose souls are attacked constantly by voices which distort and scandalize. Also, I ask your prayers above all for our seminaries and for me. I shall, as always, be pleased to receive your response to this matter as well as your good counsel and advice.

With sentiments of esteem and my prayerful best wishes, I remain

Devotedly yours in Our Lord,

*Humberto Cardinal Medeiros*

Humberto Cardinal Medeiros  
ARCHBISHOP OF BOSTON

Enclosures