

REPRINT

July 5, 1971 - Vol. II, No. 5 - DIGNITY Newsletter

THE MARTYR COMPLEX: AN EDITORIAL

The age of martyrs is not over. Many Catholic gays have become professional martyrs. They live a cherished, chosen life-style. First, they admit they are Catholic. They even go through the motions of being Catholic (without, however, receiving Communion). On the other hand, they admit they are gay and actually live a gay life. But their ego stands between the two life-styles, unwilling to draw the two together, painfully pulled in two directions. So they resign themselves to the torture of division and to -- instant martyrdom, witnesses to a life of contradiction.

Such a martyr might say: "I can't be proud of being gay because the Pope has not said I should be." -- "I cannot receive Communion until the Church issues a statement removing homosexuality from the list of sins." -- "My conscience must remain in a state of turmoil because it is my God-given cross." With such negative attitudes they are incapable of offering anything of value to either the Church or the gay community. They freeze at the thought of thinking out a moral issue on their own and making their own decisions.

It is not our purpose to deprive these noble ones of their coveted martyrdom. Rather, we would address ourselves to those individuals who feel inclined to a meaningful life.

The teaching of the Church is sometimes divided into two categories: ordinary and extraordinary teaching. The latter comprises formal declarations of particular truths and are few in number. The former is the day-to-day teaching of individuals. The latter never changes. The former does and has changed. But here the Church often gets hung up on what is religious truth and what is cultural heritage. The Church has issued no formal declaration on the inherent evil of homosexuality. Opposition to homosexuality has been woven into the fabric of society, but not as a defined Christian moral issue. It came to us through culture, even before Christianity appeared. The Church simply accepted these prejudices, never studied them, never distinguished. Now, because cultural changes are taking place all around us, the Church and society are forced to look at homosexuality more closely. Is it cultural or moral? The Church's stand on this issue can change.

However, the Catholic gay has no need to insist on this. Our attention, rather, should go to the role of our own conscience. We don't need a lifeless list of sins. We need a living force. Each day brings new challenges. Each day our life changes a little. So we want to understand more clearly the importance of our own conscience. Each one lives his own life. Each one knows his individual opportunities for fulfillment. The Church cannot live our lives. It cannot know the opportunities that open at each turn of our life. Each one must make his own decisions -- and answer for them. This is a tremendous responsibility that many shrink from. So much easier to let the priest tell us what to do, even though he cannot fully appreciate our life-context.

The Church cannot say something is forever totally wrong for everybody. The Church can address herself to an individual moral issue but must leave the way open for the individual to decide whether or not it applies to him. When an individual owns up to the dictates of his own conscience and does what he honestly feels is right for him -- no matter who says anything to the contrary -- his conscience is at peace; his problem is solved; he has become spiritually mature.

Prayer gives the strength to accept one's own conscience. The sacraments give the strength. Both must be used. In prayer we stand alone with God. It requires courage and humility. In the sacraments we strengthen the bond of love with one another. It requires crawling out of our shells and identifying with a community.

When the Catholic gay lives fully according to his own conscience, when he has found the synthesis of gay and Catholic, his life will become far more rewarding and meaningful. He will become a positive force in the Church and in society. And one age of martyrs will be brought to an end.