

# Quest Digest

## Quest and the Bishops' Conference

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'Pressure in Perspective'  
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## EDITORIAL

The first issue of *Quest Digest* appeared just over a year ago, in the autumn of 1999. It was a more modest successor to *Quest Chronicle*, which was conceived as a journal addressed primarily to the world outside our membership, canvassing issues of gay and Catholic interest. *Quest Digest* remains our window to the world, but was originally intended to contain only items from *Quest Bulletin*, our thrice-yearly publication for members, which might be of wider interest. Its scope has now been widened to place it somewhere betwixt and between *Quest Chronicle* and *Quest Digest*: it will still draw on the *Bulletin* for material, but will not be restricted to it. Thus Richard Cunliffe's and Fr O'Dowd's contributions have been specially commissioned for this issue, but the remaining items are reprinted from the November issue of the *Bulletin*. The *Digest* will appear at irregular intervals (though not less often than once a year), when there is enough material of general interest to warrant an issue. Anyone who does not presently receive a copy but would like to do so may write to the Secretary (address on inside back cover) to be placed on the mailing list.

With this issue, *Quest Digest* also has a new editor, who should therefore introduce himself to readers. He is a philosopher, who used to teach in the University of Leeds but has now retired. Though trained at Oxford, he comes from the north of England, born in east Cheshire of an Anglican father and a Greek Orthodox mother (not that either of them showed any religious enthusiasm). He became a Catholic while at Rugby School and blushes to remember the triumphalist Catholicism he espoused at that time. But he was shortly to be introduced to the exciting post-war developments in French and German Catholicism as well as to serious theology by a very remarkable Jesuit, Vincent Wilkin, who was chaplain to Catholic members of the University of Liverpool, where your editor had gone to study architecture. Then, under an extraordinary delusion that he had a vocation to the priesthood, he spent two years at Ushaw College, near Durham, studying scholastic philosophy, and two further years at Oscott College, Sutton Coldfield, studying theology. The delusion was extraordinary in that, having virtually no experience of Catholic parishes, he imagined that the life of a priest was something like that of an Anglican country clergyman as portrayed in nineteenth century novels. Seminaries in those days were so isolated that he was able to nurse this expectation undisturbed for four years. The ideas that he had picked up in Liverpool, however, were considered dangerous and disturbing in pre-Vatican II seminaries, so the Archbishop of Birmingham at the time decided to bid him good-bye. Only then, after two false starts, did he find his true vocation as a philosopher.

He joined *Quest* in about 1976, going to the quarterly meetings of *Northern Quest*, but in 1977 was invited by the chairman, Michael Stephens, to be on the panel at an open symposium on 'The Homosexual Catholic' held in Westminster Cathedral Hall on 26th November. This was *Quest's* first public event; it attracted about 200 people. *Northern Quest* fizzled out in 1981, but

was eventually succeeded by a Yorkshire group in which he participated. By 1997 a revision of *Quest's* constitution was thought necessary, for reasons explained in Richard Cunliffe's article in this issue, and in August of that year your editor was invited to chair a working party on the constitution. During the winter of 1997-98 the working party consulted widely among the members and did not find any substantial support for a change in the *aims* of *Quest* as laid down in the previous constitution; but there were many *practical* matters on which the existing constitution was either inadequate or outdated, so the majority of the working party recommended extensive changes to the latter, which were enacted at a special meeting in 1998. Your editor joined the committee in that year and last year became Deputy Chair. Charles Keal's recent resignation from the Chair for personal reasons has left him, to his dismay, 'holding the baby' until the next AGM (which will be in July 2001): the constitution provides that, if the Chair resigns, the Deputy Chair assumes the office until then.

After the members of *Quest* had declined in 1998 to alter the group's aims, the late Cardinal Hume wrote to the Chair on 28th October announcing, in his capacity as Chairman of the Bishops' Conference, that the entry for *Quest* in the *Catholic Directory* would be suspended until such time as its constitution were suitably amended. *Quest* asked for a meeting with representatives of the Bishops' Conference to discuss the matter, but this was refused until a reply to the Cardinal's letter had been received. He also asked us to consult the whole membership before responding. A wide-ranging survey of members' opinions was therefore undertaken in 1999, the results being published to members in the *Bulletin* for Spring 2000. We also discussed these results at our conference in Leicester in the summer, a report of which appeared in the Autumn issue of the *Bulletin*. Both of these documents are reproduced here for a wider audience. In the light of these findings, the committee prepared a detailed response to the points raised in the Cardinal's letter and, towards the end of September, it was sent to the Secretary of the Bishops' Conference together with a covering letter and the Survey report and Conference discussion report. We had been advised that the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference would meet in October to settle to the agenda for the full meeting in November when, we hoped, our request for a meeting could be considered. As we did not wish any of the documents submitted to the Conference to come first to the Bishops' notice from a public source, publication of this issue of the *Digest* was deferred until after the November meeting. To our disappointment, however, the Secretary replied on 10th October telling us that the agendas for the Standing Committee and the plenary meeting of the Bishops' Conference had already been agreed, so that it would not be possible for our request to be considered this year. The Bishops do not meet again until Low Week 2000, and in consequence we thought it unreasonable to hold up publication of the *Digest* for a further six months. We are sorry if this means that some members of the Bishops' Conference will see these documents for the first time in their copy of the

*Digest*. It does seem, however, that the arrangements for preparing meetings of the Conference are excessively cumbersome.

In order to make the four documents published here more intelligible, an account was needed of the correspondence and discussions with Cardinal Hume which led up to his letter of October 1998, and which go back to 1993. During that time Richard Cunliffe was either the committee's representative for liaison with the bishops, or Chair of *Quest*, so no one is better qualified than he to fill in this background, and I am delighted that he has agreed to do so.

# PRESSURE IN PERSPECTIVE

C. R. A. Cunliffe

“I know that you are aware of the pressure that is upon me to clarify the situation of *Quest* in respect of the Church’s teaching on homosexual activity”

(*Cardinal Hume, writing to Quest, July 1994*).

*Quest* was well aware of much pressure on Cardinal Basil Hume, exerted almost from his arrival at Westminster in 1976, and intensifying during the last five years of his life. The pressure came both from critics at home and in the United States and from the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome. Those bringing pressure to bear were often concerned less with any clarification of *Quest*’s situation than with whether there was any justification for the support given to *Quest* by Cardinal Hume and the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. The area of concern extended to the cardinal’s own understanding<sup>1</sup> and the views of the bishops’ conference<sup>2</sup> in relation to the position of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith<sup>3</sup> on the church’s teaching about homosexuality. The decision of the bishops’ conference to suspend *Quest*’s listing as a Catholic society in its national directory can properly be understood only in the perspective of this wider concern. Not every factor importantly influential for the decision is discernible in the five reasons given by Cardinal Hume<sup>4</sup> and the response made by *Quest*. A closer look, than has been possible in press reports, at what is on the record should help to foster good relations between the bishops and *Quest* <sup>5</sup>.

In the Catholic Church, moral theory and pastoral practice have traditionally been regarded as presenting two sides of the same coin of theological understanding. In a brief judgement on homosexuality, made for the first time at the level of Roman curial teaching responsibility, the CDF felt obliged to categorise “homosexual relations between certain people” as essentially amounting to no more than objectively immoral, since non-procreative and extra-marital, sexual activity<sup>6</sup>. The bishops’ conference, through its Social Welfare Commission, whilst accepting the objective immorality, was able to pay greater attention to the findings of the natural and social sciences, and take a pastorally more tolerant view of homosexual men and women<sup>7</sup>. It

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<sup>1</sup> Some Observations on the Catholic Church’s Teaching concerning Homosexual People, 1993 (OH); expanded as A Note on the Teaching of the Catholic Church concerning Homosexual People, 1995, revised 1997 (NH).

<sup>2</sup> An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People, 1979; republished 1994 (IH).

<sup>3</sup> Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics (*Persona Humana*), 1975 (PH); Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (*Homosexualitatis Problema*), 1986 (HP); Some Considerations concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons, 1992 (LP).

<sup>4</sup> Cardinal Hume to Quest, letter 28 October 1998.

<sup>5</sup> See also documentation and correspondence, etc, in *The Tablet*, 6 March to 1 May 1999.

<sup>6</sup> PH, §8

<sup>7</sup> “Many homophiles find the loneliness of their lives a burden. They long for intimate partnerships as much as heterophiles, but cannot find it in marriage. It is this longing for intimacy which leads some to form stable unions with each other. There will frequently be a physical genital expression in such unions. Objectively, this is morally unacceptable... Of course, pastoral care does not consist simply in the rigid and automatic application of objective moral norms. It considers the individual in his actual situation, with all his strengths and weaknesses. The decision of conscience, determining what should be done and what avoided, can only be made after prudent consideration of the real situation as well as the moral norm” (IH, pp. 11, 10).

displayed a sensitive appreciation of the evidence given to the commission by *Quest*, clearly asking for support and approval to be given to those in homosexual partnerships<sup>8</sup>. Cardinal Hume's contention, some twenty years later, that for *Quest* "to encourage and recognise loving same-sex partnerships"<sup>4</sup> marks a recent change in direction is simply without foundation.

The bishops' guidelines were not well received at the CDF where the moral basis appeared defective<sup>9</sup> and some of the pastoral advice in consequence unwarranted<sup>10</sup>. Accordingly, the CDF wrote more fully and instructively to bishops worldwide, correcting moral misjudgements<sup>11</sup>, disallowing inappropriate pastoral methods<sup>12</sup> and forbidding support of extremist homosexual organisations<sup>13</sup>. On all three counts, the English and Welsh bishops had to reconsider the position of the guidelines. In consultation with *Quest* and others, a revised version was drafted<sup>14</sup>. On two matters of crucial concern to *Quest*, the moral neutrality of homosexuality as a condition and the right of homosexual couples to receive the sacraments, no concession was made to the CDF.

The bishops also discussed whether *Quest's* constitution was ambiguous, or *Quest* as an organisation was seeking to undermine or entirely neglect the church's teaching, in the sense deprecated by the CDF, and the matter was left to the judgement of individual bishops. They were well aware that *Quest* had serious reservations in good Catholic conscience about some features of the CDF's pronouncements on homosexuality<sup>15</sup>. The revision of the guidelines was quietly dropped<sup>16</sup> and they remain in force unchanged. No bishop withdrew his support from *Quest*. If there had been any reason for the constitution to make explicit mention of "the need to live chaste lives", it would have been as identifiable then as when, some ten years later, Cardinal Hume made the suggestion<sup>17</sup>. And in 1992, with *Quest's* appearance as a

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<sup>8</sup> "Homosexual Catholics, in principle, ask neither more nor less of their Church than that they should be openly encouraged and supported in their ambitions to commit themselves to another in a loving relationship intended to be continuing, mutually life-enhancing... The physical and moral aspects of such relationships should, in a sense, be seen as secondary matters rather than public issues, in the same way as the physical and moral aspects of heterosexual relationships are generally removed from the public gaze and mediated through sensitive private contacts with confessors" (quoted in Michael Stephens, *Gay Catholics in Britain, The Story of Quest 1973–1983*, p.22).

<sup>9</sup> "Homosexuality (or homophilia) as such is neither morally good nor bad. Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a state or condition. It is morally neutral and the invert homosexual, like the heterosexual, cannot be held responsible for his tendencies" (IH, p.9).

<sup>10</sup> "In determining whether or not to administer Absolution or give Communion to a homosexual, a pastor must be guided by the general principles of fundamental theology that only a certain moral obligation may be imposed. An invincible doubt, whether of law or fact, permits one to follow a true and solidly 'probable opinion' in favour of a more liberal interpretation" (IH, p.15).

<sup>11</sup> "In the discussion which followed the publication of the Declaration, however, an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral, or even good" (HP, §3).

<sup>12</sup> "Ministers will reject theological opinions which dissent from the teaching of the Church and which, therefore, cannot be used as guidelines for pastoral care" (HP, §17).

<sup>13</sup> "All support should be withdrawn from any organisations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which are ambiguous about it, or which neglect it entirely. Such support, or even the semblance of such support, can be gravely misinterpreted" (HP, §17).

<sup>14</sup> "May I say at once that all the contributions you sent were of real value and most of the points you made have been incorporated into the second draft" (Bishop Augustine Harris, President, Social Welfare Commission, to *Quest*, letter 5 March 1987).

<sup>15</sup> The CDF's letter to bishops had been critically examined and reported in three supplements to *Quest Journal* 3, 4 and 5 (1986–1987), copies of which were sent, like all *Quest* publications, to Cardinal Hume and other bishops, and to the CDF.

<sup>16</sup> "The Vatican statement [HP] explicitly repudiated... (the view that) a good, stable, caring relationship with a person of the same sex, which includes sexual acts, may be a permissible option... and it is one of the ground rules of church politics, implicitly followed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, not to get publicly on the wrong side of the Vatican on such matters. In all the circumstances it would not be surprising, therefore, if the revision of the guidelines took quite a while" (Clifford Longley, in *The Times*, 11 May 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Cardinal Hume to *Quest*, letter 9 May 1997.

Catholic society in the official directory, its constitutional purpose was, in effect, accepted as, and it remains, unambiguous on pastoral approach and moral intent<sup>18</sup>. This was also in practice acknowledged by bishops who welcomed *Quest's* annual conferences to their dioceses<sup>19</sup>, and none was more generous in praise of *Quest* than Cardinal Hume<sup>20</sup>.

Some Catholics, however, were not in the least well disposed towards *Quest*. A small minority among clergy and laity, associated often with groups such as *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, customarily opposed to the bishops' policies on religious education and other matters, had no doubt that *Quest* was "attempting to undermine the teaching of the Church"<sup>21</sup>. These groups were also aggrieved that their own, as self-seen, impeccable Catholic credentials had earned them no official recognition of the kind given to *Quest*. The main allegation was usually that of ambiguity, as proscribed by the CDF, in one phrase of the constitution. Cardinal Hume lent no credence to this and volunteered simple advice to *Quest*: "Clarification could well be met by confirmation that in its public statements *Quest* does not campaign to alter the Church's teaching on homosexuality, and that it encourages its members to accept and live by that teaching"<sup>22</sup>. *Quest* gave that confirmation to Cardinal Hume and carefully and clearly explained the terms<sup>23</sup>. Cardinal Hume's objection, five years later, that there is such ambiguity "as to leave it unclear whether *Quest's* constitution as a whole is consistent with the teaching of the church"<sup>24</sup>, is no more justifiable than when he disallowed it in replying to *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*.

Those objecting had also disliked what they saw as an insufficiently rigorous line in Cardinal Hume's own understanding of homosexuality in the

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<sup>18</sup> In *Quest's* constitution the pastoral approach is to "men and women who are seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships"; and the moral intent is to "achieve better mutual understanding both of the moral teachings of the Church and of the characteristics of its homosexual members" (l(b)(i,ii); formerly 2(a)(b)).

<sup>19</sup> "I am grateful to *Quest* for what it is doing. Thank you for giving support to so many men and women who treasure their Catholic faith and wish to live according to its teachings, but who also acknowledge their homosexual condition. Thank you for working away at the difficult problem of stating the compatibility between them without being discouraged. Thank you for the friendship and support which you give to each other" (Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville, preaching at the 20th anniversary mass of *Quest* Birmingham group, 1995, text in *Quest Chronicle* 4 (December 1995), and in the same terms at *Quest's* national conference in Birmingham, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> "I send greetings and good wishes to the members of *Quest* on the occasion of your twentieth anniversary. Over the years *Quest* has played a valuable role in providing a forum in which homosexual Catholics have been able to meet and support one another in living out their Christian vocation. *Quest* has also helped many who have felt isolated or rejected to a renewed awareness that they are loved by God and valued members of the Catholic community... I hope *Quest* will continue in future to provide as much help to homosexual people as it has in the past" (message from Cardinal Hume, absent at the time in Lourdes, for *Quest's* national conference in London, 1993, text in *Quest Bulletin* 1 (December 1993)).

<sup>21</sup> "Your Eminence... We have shown the Constitution to homosexually inclined men... [One] stated, 'This kind of stuff infuriates me. These people have no right to describe themselves as Christians, never mind Catholics'... [Another] replied, 'Quest's hidden agenda is the couple-scene...' We will keep our response brief, believing as we do that *res ipsa loquitur* [sic]" (Mrs Daphne McLeod, Chairman, *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, to Cardinal Hume, letter 15 October 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Cardinal Hume to *Quest*, letter 11 November 1993.

<sup>23</sup> "Specifically, for clarification of what you cite from clause 2(a) [now i(b)(i)], the key words are 'seeking ways'. Homosexual Catholics, and others, come together in *Quest* because it provides, as your message earlier this year to its annual conference recognised, 'a forum' in which they can 'meet and support one another in living out their Christian vocation'. In the forum, full and due attention has to be given both to presentation of official teaching on homosexuality and to the witness of homosexual people about themselves. The gospel enjoins us to seek in order to find, but what is initially sought is not necessarily what is eventually found. How far, and in what terms, may or may not a 'full expression of (one's) homosexual nature' be reconcilable with a 'full practice of (one's) Catholic faith'? The answer requires a practical judgment of conscience: 'The maturity and responsibility of these judgments – and, when all is said and done, of the individual who is their subject – are not to be measured by the liberation of the conscience from objective truth, in favour of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions' (*Veritatis Splendor*, 61). In that search, I assure you that 'Quest will continue', as your message expressed the hope, 'to provide as much help to homosexual people as it has in the past' (*Quest* to Cardinal Hume, letter 26 November 1993).

teaching of the church. His *Observations* (1993) had been sent in draft to *Quest*. In full, and not unpersuasive, comments, *Quest* urged him to give more place to aspects of the CDF's views which showed, if somewhat meagrely, some sympathy, closer to the bishops' guidelines, with the needs of homosexual people. Nor had the cardinal taken any account of the strong support given by his predecessors at Westminster, Cardinals Griffin and Godfrey, to the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between men. This deficiency was remedied with a new paragraph on social policy which reflects *Quest's* concern for a better Catholic attitude than the CDF had shown to civil rights legislation for homosexual people. When the *Observations* were revised and reissued as the more expanded *Note* (1995), it was not sent in draft for the same wide consultation. The introduction of new sections on friendship and human love was not at all to the mind of the CDF (where love is never confused with sex – hence a further revision of the *Note* two years later). It is in the nature of ecclesiastical politics that there should be those in Rome looking for a weakening of Cardinal Hume's position on a range of matters; on homosexuality he could most easily, though very unfairly, be found vulnerable<sup>24</sup>.

Indeed, within a year of the publication of the *Observations*, the pressure on Cardinal Hume was such that he asked for a meeting to obtain more detailed clarification from *Quest*. As a result, he was given further assurances, again in terms largely of his own choosing, that could leave no reasonable doubt of *Quest's* correct situation in respect of the Church's teaching on homosexual activity<sup>25</sup>. But by now it was plain enough that, whilst securing *Quest's* position as a Catholic society, in the way that he had always

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<sup>24</sup> "Hume said... 'I'm sure it's not the pope, but on the whole homosexual thing, the documents that have come out of Rome really are badly worded. Offensive'. Hume said he subsequently produced a document on homosexuality 'to try, really, to sort of soften the blows a bit. It was very interesting because then I got a communication from Rome – it had no name on it, had no signature on it – and it was a sort of critique of what I'd written'. The cardinal said that when the nuncio to Britain handed the communication to him, the nuncio said, 'Oh, you may be interested in this. When you need to revise it [Hume's document on homosexuality], you may take account of what it says'. Hume said, 'So I looked at the first line. It stated, "There is nothing in this document that is against the church's teaching." I said, "Thank you very much. That is all I want", and handed the communication back to the nuncio'" (Cardinal Hume in a taped interview, 1998; *National Catholic Reporter*, 2 July 1999).

<sup>25</sup> (a) "I shall be hoping for clear answers to these Questions when we meet: 1. Does *Quest* support wholeheartedly, both officially and privately, the teaching of the Catholic Church that all genital acts outside marriage are immoral and thus also such genital acts between two men? 2. Does *Quest* encourage its members to take recognisable steps towards acceptance of 1 above, and to endeavour to live their lives accordingly? 3. If the answers to 1 and 2 above are 'yes', how is this reconciled with 'the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships' as stated in paragraph 2(a) [now 1(b)(i)] of your constitution?" (Cardinal Hume to *Quest*, letter 14 July 1994).

(b) "As a first step towards the clear answers for which (in your letter of 14 July) you are hoping when we meet, my direct answers are 'yes' to your first two Questions. Your third Question is incapable of being given the same kind of direct answer. The phrase taken from clause 2(a) of *Quest's* constitution was last in Question when you wrote to me on 11 November 1993. Clarification was given in my reply of 26 November 1993 and nothing, to the best of my knowledge, has happened since then to alter its acceptability. The reconciliation (or non-reconciliation), about which you now enquire, involves 'a practical judgement of conscience' of the kind I instanced. It is a judgement to be made only by the individual himself and not by *Quest*. Your third Question can be answered only in line with what I quoted from *Veritatis Splendor* (§61)" (*Quest* to Cardinal Hume, letter 20 August 1994).

(c) "I write, further to my letter of 20 August, as promised when Mr Morrow and I came to meet you and Mr. Victory on 5 September. "You told us, that some people find ground for ambiguity in a phrase, 'the full expression of their homosexual nature', in clause 2(a) of *Quest's* constitution. I explained how *Quest* sees no ambiguity when this phrase is duly taken with the correlative phrase, 'the full practice of their Catholic faith', and careful regard is had to all four clauses 2(a) to (d) [now 1(b)(i) to (iv)].

"I stressed that, as to 'full expression' and 'full practice', no reconciling is approved by *Quest*, if it would be unacceptable in the light of the Church's teaching. In particular: *Quest* does not give approval to a 'full expression' extending to 'genital acts between two men' (your letter, 14 July); and 'full-practice' entails acceptance of the Church's teaching.

"*Quest* has always worked in accordance with the 1979 pastoral guidelines provided through the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and *Quest* accepts the Church's teaching in the terms in which you have expressed understanding of it in your 1993 *Observations on the Catholic Church's Teaching concerning Homosexual People*" (*Quest* to Cardinal Hume, letter 19 September 1994).

understood and commended it, all this would be insufficient to appease his critics at home and in Rome. In particular, the CDF was adamant that any “living out of this orientation in homosexual activity”, even within a committed and stable partnership, was not a “morally acceptable option”<sup>26</sup>. It did not come as a great surprise to many priests and bishops that in a *Quest* survey (1995) of members’ views, a large majority thought “that the full expression of same-sex love within a personal relationship” could sometimes be “entirely compatible with their Catholic faith”<sup>27</sup>. It was wide of the mark for Cardinal Hume to argue later from such individual views that *Quest* itself “appears to hold ... an erroneous view on a point of the Church’s teaching”<sup>4</sup>, when *Quest* had clearly stated that it did “not give its approval to genital acts between men”<sup>28</sup>.

The bishops’ conference, after its discussion of the letter (1986) from the CDF, left further questions of homosexuality to Cardinal Hume. In his dialogue with *Quest*, he chose not to act as president of the conference but as a local bishop and cardinal. His *Observations* and *Note* on the church’s teaching were published in the same capacity. Other bishops might be kept informed, but he did not communicate with *Quest* through the conference secretariat and instead used his own Public Affairs Office. With some regret, it has to be said that the record of correspondence with the office shows that it was lacking, by comparison with the bishops’ Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship (including the Committee for Social Welfare), in the resources needed for this particular task<sup>29</sup>.

This was especially evident when debate began in Parliament, with Mrs Edwina Currie’s motion (early 1994), about equality in the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual acts. It is understandable that Cardinal Hume might have expected *Quest*, in appreciation of his support, to do nothing that would make his own position less tenable. This was bound to be difficult for *Quest*. On the age of consent, the cardinal’s personal preference was against lowering the age for homosexual acts, as against his more general advice in the *Observations* (unchanged in the *Note*) on “proposed changes in the law which are designed to eliminate injustices against homosexual people”. Despite Roman misgivings<sup>30</sup>, the cardinal had insisted that Catholics might well “reach diverse conclusions about particular legislative proposals”, and he usefully provided “a number of criteria which have to, be kept in mind”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> HP, §3.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Quest Membership Survey Report’, in *Quest Chronicle* 5 and 6 (March and June 1996) and *The Month* (November 1996)

<sup>28</sup> See 25 (c) above.

<sup>29</sup> To distinguish work proper to the Public Affairs Office from what pertains to the conference secretariat is part of a wider problem arising when the Archbishop of Westminster is president of the bishops’ conference and also a cardinal, obliging him both to lead and represent the local church and to “co-operate assiduously with the Roman Pontiff... (who) usually conducts the affairs of the universal Church through the Roman Curia” (Code of Canon Law, canons 356, 360). In some countries (e.g. the USA), any conflict of interests is often avoided by electing a ‘rank and file’ bishop as the conference president.

<sup>30</sup> “Legislation ... could certainly encourage a person with a homosexual orientation to declare his homosexuality or even to seek a partner to exploit the provisions of the law... Would [it] protect homosexual acts, public or private... [and by] entitling the homosexual partner to the privileges of employment... include such things as ‘family’ participation in the health benefits given to employees?” (LP, §15).

<sup>31</sup> “Among the most important [criteria] are the following:

– are there reasonable grounds for judging that the institution of marriage and the family could, and would, be undermined by a change in the law?

*Quest* had these criteria well in mind. In default of the statement issued from the cardinal's office, *Quest* wrote citing the criteria to MPs and members of the House of Lords, and asking support for Mrs Currie. The office had placed special emphasis on the cardinal's urging "Parliament to be cautious... the law should always seek to protect young people and to promote moral values that society recognises as wholesome". *Quest* maintained, and continues to maintain, that equality in the age of consent, as finally achieved in law last December, has promoted the fundamentally wholesome moral value of the equality of all citizens, whatever their sexual orientation, before the law.

None of this made life any better for Cardinal Hume, since it was easily exploitable by his critics to discredit his whole stance on homosexuality. He may have felt rather let down by *Quest*; Basil Hume was not a man or abbot to be trifled with. It does help to explain why, four years later, he peremptorily complained – citing nothing because there was nothing to cite – that *Quest*'s statement, 'Quest with the Church'<sup>32</sup>, "strongly suggests a change of direction... seeming to move away from a clear acceptance of the Church's teaching"<sup>4</sup>. He knew, of course, that his opponents would not fail to make use of the support given by *Quest* to the work of Stonewall, the leading gay rights organisation<sup>33</sup>. And he could scarcely have failed to be having some doubts about the ecclesiastical wisdom of the support that he had given to *Quest*<sup>34</sup>.

It had become apparent to Cardinal Hume that the best solution, whether for himself or *Quest*, was complete removal from its constitution of all mention of associating men and women who were seeking fully to reconcile their homosexuality and their Catholic faith. Such a step, he must have known, would come close to destroying what *Quest*, like himself, had regarded as its Catholic inspiration and fidelity<sup>35</sup>. But it is not unusual, in the life of the church, for the demands of ecclesiastical solidarity to outweigh the challenges of ecclesial integrity.

The opportunity for him to exert special pressure for constitutional amendments came when *Quest* asked him to support, as in 1993, its conference, to be held in his diocese, to celebrate the silver jubilee of *Quest*. He now chose to describe his meeting with *Quest*, two and a half years earlier, as "inconclusive, and even unsatisfactory", and, of the assurances<sup>25</sup> given, and

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– would society's rejection of a proposed change in the law be more harmful to the common good than the acceptance of such a change?  
– does a person's sexual orientation or activity constitute, in specific circumstances, a sufficient and relevant reason for treating that person in any way differently from other citizens?" (OH §12, NH, §13).

<sup>32</sup> Text in *Quest Bulletin* 23 (June 1999)

<sup>33</sup> "Quest supports the work of Stonewall, the leading secular organisation working for lesbian and gay equality in Britain, inasmuch as it ensures the avoidance of every sign of unjust discrimination in regard to homosexual people (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2358)" ('Quest with the Church', §21).

<sup>34</sup> "I remember soon after his appointment to Westminster his outlining to me what he might say pastorally in regard to homosexuality. I found it quite surprisingly radical but he quickly added that if anyone were to report in public what he said he would simply deny it... In point of fact his public statement on the subject in 1993 was probably much like what he had said to me seventeen years earlier... As a leader he was torn between the people who believed, for instance, *Humanae vitae* to be profoundly mistaken and those who thought such a belief almost incompatible with Catholicism" (Adrian Hastings; 'Cardinal Basil Hume', in *Priests and People* (July 2000)).

<sup>35</sup> "The Second Vatican Council has led to a deeper and richer understanding of the crucial role of lay people in the life of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, §37). Today, more than ever, the Church needs committed lay people, whatever their sexual orientation, willing to play a full part in building the Kingdom of God" (Cardinal Hume, message to *Quest*, as note 20 above).

accepted without further question then, he now said that “what has never been satisfactorily explained is how the wording of your constitution accords with” them<sup>36</sup>. He made it clear that, unless the constitution was amended in a way acceptable to him, *Quest* could expect no further support from him. But whether accepted or rejected, such changes would, it seemed, serve to put an end to his problems. At the annual general meeting in 1998, the Catholic consciences of the members of *Quest* did not allow them to act as he wished<sup>37</sup>.

The decision should not be construed as diminishing the affection and esteem in which Cardinal Hume was held by *Quest*. At a more profound level of spiritual counsel, characteristic of Father Basil, and to which members were attentive, in the conclusion to his *Observations and Note*, all Catholics have been reminded, with some mystic ambiguity of his own, that “in all the circumstances and situations of life, God calls each person, whatever his or her sexual orientation, to fulfil that part of his created design which only that person can fulfil”<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Cardinal Hume to *Quest*, letter 10 March 1997.

<sup>37</sup> “Whatever the individual reasons *Quest* members had for voting as they did, which will all be different, most of them shared a sense of the unreality of the Church’s teaching as it relates to sexual matters. In this they are surely no different from many heterosexual Catholics. For *Quest* to have acted as it did was not a rejection of chastity: it was a refusal to collude with an official line which is inadequate” (Charles Keal, Chair, *Quest*, letter in *The Tablet*, 1 May 1999; the editor then closed the correspondence on *Quest*’s suspension from the *Catholic Directory*).

<sup>38</sup> OH, §12; NH, §17

# QUEST MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

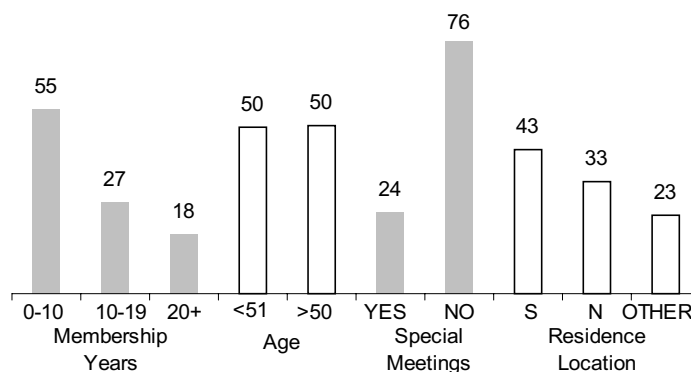
January 2000

## THE RESULTS

**Timothy Potts, on behalf of the committee**

The ratio of replies received to survey forms sent out was 132:254, i.e. 52%. By the general standards of surveys, this is a splendid response: 25% is normally considered good. It gives us confidence that the replies represent the views of members as a whole and not just of a possibly biased sample. This is especially important as the outcome is exceptionally clear-cut: there are very few questions upon which opinion is significantly divided.

The first four questions were designed to provide information yielding broad categories that could be used to classify subsequent answers. Not every question was answered by every respondent. Percentages are of those replying to the question, and are shown in the following chart:



**Question 1:** *For how many years have you been a member of Quest?*

Over half the members (55%) have joined within the last ten years. That might suggest a rapid turnover of membership, but it must be considered in relation to the answers to the next question:

**Question 2:** *How old are you?*

Only half a dozen members were aged under 30, but if we add them to the 30–50 group, the respondents are exactly divided between the under 51s and the over 50s. Hence it is not surprising that only 27% have been members for 10–19 years and 18% members for 20 years and over.

In retrospect, it would have been more useful to have used under 40, 40–60 and over 60 as the three categories. No estimate of the correlation between age and length of membership has been undertaken.

**Question 3:** *Did you attend the special meetings at the Quest annual conference in London in 1998?*

Over three-quarters (76%) did not attend the special meetings, so we are not primarily getting the views of members who attend AGMs and conferences, but of those whose opinions are otherwise difficult to discover.

**Question 4:** *In which county do you live?*

The reason for this question was to find out if there are any significant differences of opinion between members according to their geographical location. Unfortunately, some 25 respondents misread 'county' as 'country' in this question, giving replies such as 'England' and 'UK'. These, together with respondents from abroad, made up 23%. Of the remainder, the numbers in any county except London were so small that the only meaningful comparison of views is between the south of England (43%) and the remainder of England together with Scotland (33%, called 'north' for short). These groups are made up as follows:

- 1) South: London, Middlesex, Surrey, Essex, Sussex, Somerset, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire, Wales.
- 2) North: West Midlands, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Norfolk, Cheshire, Merseyside, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Co. Durham, Tyne & Wear, Scotland.

**Questions 5–9 were designed to elicit members' views on some moral and religious issues relating to homosexuality.**

**Question 5:** *'There's me and you, and I hope that Christ may be a third between us. ... so that we may ascend from that holy love in which a friend is embraced to that in which Christ is embraced' (St. Aelred of Riveaulx, On Spiritual Friendship, 1, 134). Do you think that Christ could ever be a third in a same-sex sexual relationship?*

Two or three respondents dismissed this as a silly or ridiculous question; its point, however, was to ask whether having a same-sex sexual relationship is compatible with being a Christian. The replies as a whole are shown in the following table:

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	70	80	79	79	78
Unsure	22	17	17	18	15
No	7	2	5	3	6

This shows that respondents thought overwhelmingly that the two are compatible, even the southerners, who were notably less sure than the northerners. There were no significant age differences.

**Question 6:** *Do you consider that sex outside marriage is always wrong?*

This question deliberately applies both to hetero- and homosexual relationships.

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	0	10	4	2	6
Unsure	4	13	7	7	6
No	96	77	89	91	87

The result here is even more decisive: a resounding ‘No’, although this time the northerners are significantly less sure than the southerners, and the older respondents a little less sure than the younger. One or two respondents qualified their answer ‘No’ by saying that it did not apply to married people; i.e. (in more traditional terminology) they thought that adultery is always wrong but not fornication (or gay sex). We must assume that respondents were aware of standard Church teaching on the point, expressed, for example, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: ‘Carnal union is morally legitimate only when a definitive community of life between a man and a woman has been established’ (§2391).

**Question 7:** *Are you convinced by any arguments that you have heard to the effect that sex outside marriage is always wrong?*

The purpose of this question was to find out how far members have been convinced by *arguments* they have heard; thus it would be quite consistent for someone to hold that sex outside marriage is always wrong, yet not find any arguments that he had encountered to that effect convincing. The converse is *not* consistent: to find the arguments convincing but still not accept their conclusion – though one or two respondents managed this *tour de force*, which explains how 89% consider that extra-marital sex is not always wrong, yet only 86% are unconvinced by arguments to that effect:

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	4	7	6	7	4
Unsure	11	10	9	11	7
No	86	83	86	82	89

Nevertheless, the overall result is that the vast majority remains unconvinced by commonly purveyed arguments. The south/north divide is insignificant and slightly more younger than older respondents are moved by the arguments.

**Question 8:** *If those in authority in the Church say that a certain kind of action is wrong and if, after having carefully weighed their view and the reasons they give for it, you find yourself unable to agree, do you think that you can go ahead and do it in good conscience?*

This is one of the most important questions in the survey. We thought that no Catholic would reject authoritative Church teaching without first examining it carefully, informing himself of the reasons for it and the degree of authority claimed for it. It must surely be very uncomfortable and disagreeable for a Catholic to feel compelled to reject any authoritative Church teaching, even though it may not be infallible. But, at the end of the day, would he give his now informed conscience absolute priority?

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	78	70	80	79	81
Unsure	18	25	17	18	16
No	4	5	3	3	3

Four out of five respondents said 'Yes', with only 3% saying 'No'. Northerners were significantly less sure than southerners, but there is almost no age difference.

**Question 9:** *Do you agree with either of the following statements?*

(a) *A homosexual orientation, regardless of any sexual activity, although not a sin, is a more or less strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil and thus must be seen as an objective disorder.*

This is quotation from a Vatican document of 1986 on the pastoral care of homosexual persons (slightly changed at the beginning to make it clearer). It extends the scope of an earlier Vatican statement (1975) that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered' to cover homosexual 'inclination' (i.e. orientation). Precisely what is meant by 'disorder' in this context has been the subject of much discussion. Whatever the terminology may have meant to its authors, it undoubtedly gave widespread offence, and that is doubtless reflected in the decisive rejection of it by respondents to the survey:

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	0	0	1	2	0
Unsure	7	7	7	10	4
No	93	93	92	89	96

North and south are unanimous on this matter; younger respondents are slightly less sure in their rejection than older ones.

(b) *Homosexuality as such is neither morally good nor bad. Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a state or condition. It is morally neutral and the homosexual, like the heterosexual, cannot be held responsible for his tendencies.*

This is also a quotation, from a document of 1979 on the pastoral care of homosexual people produced under the auspices of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales and subsequently accepted by the Conference. Respondents to the survey endorsed it almost unanimously, northerners even more so than southerners:

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	91	98	95	95	94
Unsure	5	0	3	3	3
No	4	2	2	2	3

There is no significant difference between younger and older respondents.

It is of interest to note that quotation (a) occurs as part of a rebuke to those who assent to quotation (b). The sentence that precedes (a) in the 1986 Vatican document avers that in the discussion of the 1975 document, 'an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral, or even good'.

**Questions 10-13 asked members what they thought *Quest's* policies should be on various issues.**

*Question 10: Should Quest's top priority be :*

- (a) *the pastoral care of individuals?*
- (b) *to support legal reforms?*
- (c) *neither, but rather: .....(indicate)?*

90% of respondents thought that the pastoral care of individuals should be *Quest's* top priority. Nobody chose support of legal reforms alone, but 5 respondents thought that pastoral care and legal reforms should be joint top priorities, while 1 coupled pastoral care with dialogue with the Church. 3 other replies are tantamount to choosing (a): '*Quest ... should continue to promote its original intention as a refuge for gay and lesbian Christians vilified by their respective churches*'; '*to provide support & fellowship for gay (Catholic) Christians*'; '*to help the individual to come to terms and be comfortable with being gay & Catholic*'. This leaves only 4 replies which clearly do not opt for (a) or (b); they are as follows:

- 'persuading the clergy to abandon its homophobic attitudes'
- 'confidently Catholic and militant'
- 'raise awareness, theologically and spiritually founded'
- 'inform others in the Church about the true nature of homosexuality'.

Overall, then, there is virtual unanimity that pastoral care should be Quest's top priority.

**Question 11:** *Should Quest actively support legislation:*

(a) *to ban discrimination at work against lesbians and gay men?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	87	82	85	82	86
Unsure	6	9	8	10	6
No	7	9	8	8	9

After the majorities of over 90% seen in some of the previous questions, these seem less enthusiastic, but it must be remembered that they are still overwhelming majorities. Northern support for active support to end work discrimination is slightly less than southern, and younger than older. The latter is surprising, since many in the <50 age group are retired and thus no longer at risk in this respect. Perhaps the reason is that work discrimination is no longer as bad as it was, so that the older respondents have worse memories and the younger feel less threatened.

(b) *to lift the ban on lesbian and gay men in the armed forces?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	73	80	75	70	80
Unsure	10	5	11	14	8
No	18	15	4	16	13

Several respondents did not answer (b), noting that it is no longer applicable since the government has bowed to the judgment of the European Court of Rights; hence the smaller number of answers. In retrospect, it would have been better to have had a question about Clause 28 of the Local Government Act; but, in view of the replies to the remaining three parts of the question, there can be little doubt of what the majority view would have been.

(c) *recognizing same-sex partnerships?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	77	81	80	77	82
Unsure	16	12	15	15	15
No	7	7	5	8	3

This is the most controversial of the four sections of question 11, so it is interesting to find that so high a majority of respondents want Quest to support actively legislation in this area. Again the north seems slightly more radical than the south, and the older than the younger members. The term 'partnerships' was chosen carefully instead of 'marriages', so that respondents would not be distracted by side-issues from the essential of securing, under

whatever name, some of the benefits accorded to married partners by the state.

(d) *to ban all forms of discrimination against lesbians and gay men?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	81	84	83	81	80
Unsure	12	4	9	10	8
No	7	11	8	10	12

There was some discussion in the committee whether the question should read 'unjust discrimination' rather than merely 'discrimination', but this amendment was rejected on the ground that anyone proposing discrimination would argue that it was just, and opinions could differ widely on what constituted unjust discrimination in a given case.

The majorities in favour of active support are again overwhelming, with no significant difference by location or age.

The replies to this question as a whole, then, show that members expect *Quest* to concern itself with gay legal reform, even if not with such a high priority as pastoral care. There is little support for the view that *Quest* should be an *exclusively* pastoral organisation.

**Question 12:** *Should Quest work for change in official though not infallible Church teaching on sexuality?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	83	90	90	87	92
Unsure	9	10	7	7	8
No	7	0	3	7	0

This is a very decisive result. The majorities are noticeably higher than those for supporting legal reforms, with the northern respondents showing as more radical than the southern, and the older than the younger. It was assumed that, as Catholics, we could not wish to see any change in infallible teaching. It is, however, disputable whether there is *any* infallible teaching on sexuality. What is taught in the Bible is infallible, but there are relatively few texts on sexuality and their interpretation is much disputed; nor has their interpretation, for the most part, been infallibly decided by the Church.

It is sometimes suggested that Catholics are not free to work for change even in fallible Church teaching. However, this is rather selectively applied. A recent campaign to change official teaching on imposition of the death penalty by the state resulted in substantial changes to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a document on which the ink has not yet been dry for 10 years. No one has criticised those who worked for the change for doing so; yet putting people to death is surely a much more serious matter than any aspect of sexual behaviour. And, of course, history offers many examples of working

for change in official but fallible teaching; sometimes those who did so have been persecuted by the Church but, once successful, are revered as pioneering reformers.

**Question 13:** *Do you think it should be part of the purpose of Quest to encourage its members to live chaste lives:*

(a) *where 'chaste' means 'with no sexual activity'?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	6	7	7	10	3
Unsure	15	12	12	7	17
No	80	80	81	83	80

A few respondents answered 'No' to all three parts of this question, and two made it clear why: 'Quest as an organisation should not have a position on the sexual activity or otherwise of its members'; 'Quest should be neutral where sexual activity is concerned. Chastity is up to each individual. Quest should not state that it encourages or discourages members to live chaste lives!' The question was placed in the survey partly because Cardinal Hume wanted us to include encouragement to chastity as one of the aims of *Quest* in our constitution. 'Chastity', though, is highly ambiguous in modern parlance, so we thought it necessary to spell out some current senses; for all except the married, (a) corresponds to authoritative current Church teaching. The overwhelming majority of respondents did not think that *Quest* should encourage chastity in this sense, and there are no significant differences by location or age.

(b) *where chastity is understood as temperance in sexual activity, i.e. avoiding both sexual excess and deficiency?*

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	55	52	54	54	54
Unsure	15	19	16	17	16
No	30	29	30	30	30

This is the traditional notion of chastity, an application of the cardinal virtue of temperance to sex. Following Aristotle's idea that virtue lies in a mean between extremes, Doctors of the Church have noted that too little sex can be bad as well as too much, although, of course, how much is the right amount depends, in their view, on marital status. Perhaps the corollary about sexual deficiency made respondents hesitant about giving chastity in this sense their backing; at any rate, we now have only bare majorities in favour.

(c) where chastity means integrating one's sexuality with the rest of one's personality and into relationships with other people?

%	South	North	All	<51	>50
Yes	70	69	73	74	73
Unsure	18	22	17	13	20
No	12	8	10	13	8

This notion of chastity is taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2337, which also cites the traditional sense at §2341. Some respondents indicated that they were not sure what it means, but the results show that it had substantially more support than chastity in the traditional sense. This may be partly due to a guest speaker's advocacy of it at a recent *Quest* conference and his arguments that it can be understood in a manner acceptable to gays. One respondent wrote at length about the importance of this integration and urged a still more positive view of gay orientation than that expressed in question 9(b).

**Question 14:** *Quest's listing in the Catholic Directory has recently been suspended, on the initiative of the late Cardinal Hume but with the agreement of the Bishops' Conference, though it remains in a number of diocesan directories. Quest did not ask to be listed in the Catholic Directory in the first place, and was not asked either about the suspension; moreover, the precise significance of a listing in the Directory is unclear. But even if the interpretation to be put upon this action is uncertain, it indicates that the Bishop's Conference is less happy with Quest than it was formerly. Have you, therefore, any suggestion about what measures your committee might take to restore that confidence?*

43 respondents did not answer this question. Of the remaining 89, 29 (33%) urged dialogue with the bishops. Some mentioned the late Cardinal Hume's letter of October 1998 and said that we owed the bishops a full reply to it. Others suggested that selective contacts with individual bishops and priests were preferable to an approach to the Bishops' Conference, but 'Don't waste time talking with bigoted clergy - with them the best thing is to pray for a miracle!' Some respondents thought that dialogue would be helped if Quest distanced itself from the more extreme gay organisations like *Outrage!*, others if it eschewed any 'political' agenda. One interesting proposal was that we should try to 'set up a regular, if informal, channel of communication between Quest and the Church hierarchy to discuss key issues'. Another suggestion was that communication should not be limited to the clergy, but should extend to other Catholic organisations. Yet other respondents emphasised that the *Catholic Directory* issue was not all that important, nor, even, to have the support of the bishops. A further 5 replies (6%), while supporting dialogue, suggested that it should be postponed until there was a new Archbishop of Westminster and even (1 reply) a new Pope.

10 replies (11%) proposed various compromises that, it was thought, might please the bishops, e.g. explicitly encouraging celibacy, avoiding any kind of

confrontation, ceasing to work for any changes either in Church teaching or civil legislation. One proposal was to 'prepare an ambiguous statement we can sign that bishops will accept'.

41 respondents (46%) urged *Quest* to stand firm for its principles regardless of the bishops. There was even an undercurrent of annoyance with them, e.g.: 'Quest should not prostitute itself to curry favour with bishops. It is they who need to restore *our* confidence in them'.

'The fact that the bishops have changed their attitude towards Quest may reflect an increase in their own Conservatism ... I am not that concerned that the Bishops choose not to support us at present. Let us carry on as we are and pray for enlightenment in the Church hierarchy'.

'Are the bishops concerned with confidence for themselves rather than with the momentous issues that face the church ...? Our commitment is to follow the teachings of Christ (let him that is without sin cast the first stone)'.

'To restore confidence with English & Welsh hierarchy, (1) change the membership of the staff in the Vatican curia, (2) let them show positive support of gay people when they come across gay issues on the news'.

'There can be no compromise with the increased homophobic exclusion of us from the life of our Church family. Quest should stand uncompromisingly in favour of the dignity of our sexuality as God's loving gift to us and the dignity of loving and long-term ... partnerships, including loving sexual relationships. Church authority will have to learn one day to stop trampling over people's dignity - it is against the love of Jesus'.

'Stop being so preoccupied with Directories and Bishops! How many worried people learn about Quest for the first time in Catholic directories? How can bishops speak openly in support when their boss and the "establishment" are of another view? ... We have an adult mind and conscience - why wait for a nod of approval?'

'I, like so many gay Catholics, have been virtually excluded from the Church by its attitude ... Unless the Church recognises it is not only wrong, but frankly is defying Christ when it whips up homophobia ..., the pastoral care that can be given to gay/lesbian Catholics can only be limited'.

'It would be much better to ensure that Quest looks after its own members who have been so badly let down by its Church. If we are strong, the Bishops will come to us'.

'What about Quest's confidence in the Bishops' Conference? Somebody needs to tell the Vatican and the Bishops where to get off'.

'Quest is essential in [the face of] the homophobic-Church's attitudes, in order that gay and lesbian Christians are made aware that they are as important as anyone else and loved by God. Otherwise many practising gay people will continue to turn their back on local parishes and lapse altogether'.

'the confidence of gays/lesbians ... is of more importance than the confidence of bishops'.

'The Church has isolated itself – it must realise we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. God supports homosexuality – I was born homosexual – love is what matters and God loves and supports us. How does a priest know? Some are out of date, ignorant weirdos – do they know what love is – human love?'

Other respondents within this group thought that we should not worry what the bishops think of Quest: 'Quest should stand its ground and continue to promote its original intention as a refuge for gay and lesbian Christians vilified by their respective Churches – in the final analysis it is only [us] face to face with our ... Lord, not what in our case the Roman Curia or the rest of the hierarchy think'.

'the members of Quest have a better understanding of what it means to be Catholic and gay... Quest should pursue policies which it feels appropriate without undue concern to its perceived status by the Bishops' Conference'.

'I do not think it should be a goal for Quest to see the Bishops' Conference "happy", although this might occasionally be a side effect of authentic and knowledgeable statements/policy'.

'It is more important that the *members* have confidence in Quest committee than that the Bishops' Conference does'.

'It is excellent ... that many Catholics are supported, nurtured and kept within the Church due to Quest's presence. Therefore ... the fact that we are more marginalised by the Bishops' Conference is a small price to pay for keeping Catholics in the fold'.

'Quest's priority should be to allow Catholic homosexuals to be able to reconcile their faith and sexuality in a true, loving Christian environment. The happiness or unhappiness of the bishops should not influence Quest'.

'Quest should be true to its mission and ... not be overly concerned about winning the approval of the hierarchy. Observers should be able to see in the way Quest conducts itself that we adhere to the values of the gospel'.

'In recent years Quest has become more direct and open in its public statements on matters affecting the life of gay and lesbian people, whether of a religious nature or not. Perhaps the Bishops' Conference has interpreted this as an "undesirable" manifestation of a new militant approach in contrast to Quest's previous attempts to tread a middle path of diplomacy with Church authorities. Frankly I prefer this more realistic attitude as it shows a greater concern for Quest members' well-being and less of a need to please the Bishops' Conference'.

Some respondents also thought listing in the *Catholic Directory* unimportant: 'Listing in the Catholic Directory is an irrelevant issue'.

'Quest never needed to be in the directory in the first place. I do not know any member yet who found out about Quest from the Catholic Directory'.

There were also a few positive suggestions about what Quest should be doing:

'I think it ...important to keep in the public eye (Church and wider) the precise teaching of the Church on the *condition* of homosexuality and its correct pastoral response'.

'the main purpose of Quest should be to work for a true understanding of the nature of homosexuality as a state or condition that is morally neutral'.

'there is a long, patient task, in combatting ignorance and prejudice directed at lesbians and gays, an encouragement to 'come out', in as supported way as possible for Quest's members and a conscious but insistent proving by our 'fruits' that gays and lesbians are wholly justified by God in integrating their sexuality with their faith, as heterosexuals are'.

'Quest should show that it is part of the missionary activity of the church in Britain, winning back souls who have been lost, either to a materialistic club culture, or to spiritual despair'.

Finally, 4 replies (4%) did not fit easily into any of the above categories. One proposed a very long-term policy to root out anti-gay prejudice: 'the committee should focus ... on finding a way to deal with ... homosexuality as a school topic in a dignified, sensitive way'. Another suggested that the official demand for celibacy needed to be reconciled with advice given in the confessional. The last left us with a thought to ponder: 'I don't think it is *ever* [worth] trying to make us respectable - as Catholic or gay. I don't think Christianity is about respectability'.

## CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

In their responses to the Survey, members urged *Quest* to take an active stance in three areas: pastoral care (their top priority), working for change in official but fallible Church teaching on sexuality, and supporting legislation prohibiting anti-gay discrimination and recognising same-sex partnerships. During the Conference at Leicester in July, an hour and a half was set aside for the 30 or so members present to discuss the results of the Survey. The first hour of the discussion, accordingly, was devoted to each of these areas in turn, and the remaining half-hour to other issues arising from the survey that members wished to raise.

### *Pastoral Care*

You cannot offer pastoral care to people with whom you have no contact, so publicity for *Quest* is essential. At the AGM in Bath in 1999, a motion was passed unanimously instructing the committee "to give a high priority, during the coming year, to appointing a publicity co-ordinator, who can seek ways of increasing public knowledge of *Quest* ..., especially amongst individuals who can refer lesbian and gay Catholics to *Quest* ... and also in places to which lesbian and gay Catholics may go". Unfortunately *Quest* had a very small committee during the 1999–2000 year, and it proved impossible to make this appointment; but the committee is now up to full strength and this will be one of its first preoccupations. In *Linkline* we also have a telephone contact service. In common with helplines all over the country, the number of calls to *Linkline* has gone down in recent years. Additionally, whereas *Linkline* could be contacted in London and in Glasgow, the Glasgow Linkliners no longer function, so it may be that some potential enquirers are deterred by the cost of a long-distance call. This has been addressed and it is now possible to call *Linkline* on the Freephone number 0808 8080 234. Another avenue of publicity is our website, [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~quest/](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~quest/), which receives a healthy number of visits and which could profitably be developed further.

The pastoral care that *Quest* can offer is admirably summarised in the constitution: 'associating lay men and women who are seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships'. To a large extent this aim will be pursued in private conversations, especially through the help and support that members of a local group can give to new members. But *Quest* should also be able to introduce members to priests with whom they can talk over matters of conscience and celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is clearly of great value when a local group is in touch with priests who will say Mass at group meetings and provide opportunity for Reconciliation.

One speaker emphasised that in introducing members to priests, *Quest* is not saying that they are *gay* priests, but rather recommending them as good pastors and sympathetic to gay people, their sexual orientation being

unknown to *Quest*. A priest remarked that, if priests are to be approached to celebrate Mass at group meetings, they should be invited to become fully involved in the group – proper chaplains; they should not be phoned for a Mass as one would phone for a pizza! This implies that priests should be *trained* to be chaplains to groups. The meeting was told that literature for this very purpose has been produced in the U.S., e.g. James L. Empereur, SJ, *Spiritual Direction and the Gay Person* (New York, Continuum, 1998) and, on the Internet, at the Los Angeles archdiocesan website, <http://cardinal.la-archdiocese.org> The Lesbian and Gay Ministry's recent statement on so-called 'reparative therapies' can also be found on <http://mlgc.la-archdiocese.org>. In England and Wales, a prime source is also, of course, *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*, prepared by the Catholic Social Welfare Commission and approved by the Bishops' Conference. This was originally published in 1979, but was reprinted in 1994 by Catholic AIDS Link together with Cardinal Hume's *Observations on the Catholic Church's Teaching concerning Homosexual People* of 1993.

### ***Working for Change***

The first way of working for change in official but fallible Church teaching on sexuality is by reasoned argument. This is not for everybody; it requires a lot of background knowledge and ill-informed attempts can do more harm than good. A member observed that *Quest* already has a substantial record of working for change through its publications *Quest Newsletter* (1984–6), *Quest Journal* (1986–93) and *Quest Chronicle* (1993–6), an initiative that is now being carried on in a more modest way by *Quest Digest*. He went on to suggest that in interpreting members' answers to questions 6–8 of the survey, it is important to bear in mind a distinction between a particular action, done by a given individual on a specific occasion in certain circumstances, being described as right or wrong, and a *category* of action being described as objectively good or bad. It does not follow, for example, that if a certain category of action is bad, it is always wrong for a person to perform any particular action of that category. Hence the replies of the majority of members to questions 6–8 are not inconsistent with the statements by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1975, 1986) that 'according to the objective moral order' homosexual acts are 'intrinsically disordered' because 'deprived of their essential and indispensable finality' and 'able in no case to be approved of'. It is a pity that the CDF has never offered a discussion of homosexual acts in terms of subjective circumstances, commensurate with the great attention it has given to objective principles.

Another member informed us that a new initiative by way of reasoned discussion is also afoot. Diagnosing 'a seeming impasse in Catholic theological development, especially but not exclusively on issues of lesbian and gay theology', a group of Catholics has set up a closed e-mail group under the title *Sexual Identities & Catholic Conversations*, to ask 'how the creative surge of theological reflection in lesbian and gay Catholic circles might help set free the rest of the Church as it seeks to address questions of

faith and sexuality.’ Initially the members will discuss Mark D. Jordan’s book *The Silence of Sodom* (University of Chicago Press) and another unpublished paper. This discussion is described as a ‘pilot’, but a pilot for what remains unclear. At any rate, the group’s steering committee will meet in October to consider how to proceed, and presumably the ultimate goal is a publication.

The survey question on this topic read: ‘Should *Quest* work for change in official though not infallible Church teaching on sexuality?’ This implies a distinction between two senses of ‘the teaching of the Church’, which needs, a speaker urged, to be related to current Vatican teaching on the topic. This distinguishes three levels of doctrine. The first is *the Word of God*, qualified as either written or handed down. What is written comprises anything revealed by God in the Bible, but the alternative, ‘handed down’, allows for oral traditions that never got into the Bible. First level teachings can be set forth by the Church in either of two ways. The first is ‘by a solemn judgment’, the second ‘by the ordinary and universal magisterium’. The former is rare, proclamation of a doctrine by the bishops in a Council or by the Pope under the conditions imposed by the first Vatican Council; nor is any doctrine to be understood as having been thus defined unless it has quite clearly been so. Members of the Church in general are required to believe the teaching of the Church at this level as revealed by God.

The second level of teaching consists of what is *definitively* proposed by the Church on faith or morals. These are matters ‘necessarily connected to divine revelation ... either for historical reasons or by a logical relationship’, teachings ‘necessary for faithfully keeping and expounding the deposit of faith, even if they have not been proposed ... as formally revealed’. Office-holders in the Church are required to ‘firmly accept and hold’ these teachings. Finally, the third level consists of ‘the teachings which either the Roman pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act’. This includes ‘all those teachings ... presented as true or at least as sure, even if they have not been defined ... or proposed as definitive’. Office-holders are required to ‘adhere with submission of will and intellect’ to these teachings.

In the survey, the term ‘official though not infallible Church teaching’ was used primarily for this third level. It *could* also include some items from the second level, for the following reason. The distinction of the three levels is itself a third level teaching. Hence it is not enough for an authority to *claim* that he is giving a definitive teaching; it has also to be shown that the matter in question *is* ‘necessarily connected to divine revelation’. So the situation could arise in which something is proclaimed as a definitive teaching but, after due consideration, one judged that the necessary connection had not been proven. In that case, one would account it as official though not infallible. If, however, it really is necessary for faithfully expounding and keeping the Word of God, then it belongs with the latter. Consequently, the essential distinction is between the Word of God plus any genuinely

definitive teachings, on the one hand, and third level teachings plus those claimed but not proven to be definitive, on the other. The expression 'the teaching of the Church' is sometimes used for both groups, sometimes only for the first. Unfortunately it is sometimes also used to suggest that the second is as binding upon Catholics as the first, i.e. to bully people. This is a tendency, known as 'creeping infallibility', that must be firmly resisted: it may serve some vested interests to blur this distinction, but it does not serve the interests of truth, which should be a Christian's first concern.

### *Supporting Legislation*

The view of the majority of those responding to the survey was that *Quest* should actively support legislation in two areas: the first, legislation aimed at ending anti-gay discrimination; the second, legislation providing for same-sex partnerships to have official recognition by the state. One respondent said that such campaigning should be left to organisations like *Stonewall* that are able to do it competently, and that *Quest* should do little more than indicate its support. No one objected to this in the discussion, but an exception was noted: the Catholic bishops in this country have frequently opposed legislation of this kind and should be asked to support such legislation in the future. Another member reminded the meeting that Cardinal Griffin, in evidence to the Wolfenden Committee in 1956, had supported decriminalisation of homosexual acts between men. Yet their fears have sometimes been unreal, e.g. that it would be a threat to marriage or the family, when in fact the opposite may be true. Another respondent to the survey had suggested that *Quest* should try to arrange a regular contact with the Bishops' Conference with whom issues of this kind could be discussed *before* the Conference decided what position to adopt. This idea was endorsed, as the attitude of the Bishops' Conference to legislative proposals cannot be left for other groups to deal with and is properly a responsibility of *Quest*.

### *General Issues*

In the event, little was discussed under this heading. *Quest* was urged to keep close contact with the Roman Catholic caucus of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement, whose work is parallel to ours in some respects. This should be no problem, as there is a significant overlap of membership between the two groups. There was also some discussion of the procedure that should be followed in re-opening contact with the Bishops' Conference.

## RESPONSE TO CARDINAL HUME'S LETTER

Cardinal Hume wrote 'The single point at issue is whether or not there is justification for *Quest* to be listed among the Catholic organisations whose names appear with ecclesiastical approval in the *Catholic Directory*. If an organisation is so listed, the assumption must be that it accepts the Church's teaching set out in a manner which is in no way ambiguous'. This supposes that a case must be made out for listing *Quest* in the *Directory*. The assumption stated by the Cardinal expresses his concern that there is no specific reference in *Quest's* constitution to the teaching of the Church on homosexuality and the need to strive to model lives upon it, as people could reasonably expect to find. We do not think this *was* a reasonable demand, for three reasons.

First, it is normal for a constitution to say that membership of the society that it governs is open to all who agree with its aims. Hence if adherence to official but not infallible Church teaching were to be included in its aims, no one could be a member who did not agree with that teaching. The survey shows that most of our members dissent from some official but not infallible Church teaching on sexuality, as do millions of heterosexual Catholics. Moreover, our outreach is often to marginal Catholics who for one reason or another are disenchanted with the Church in its present form, so that to demand assent to official but not infallible Church teaching before they could become members of *Quest* would be to cut off our ministry at its roots. Many of these people do not have any contacts with priests; do the bishops really want to obstruct our lay Catholic approach to them?

Second, we found it necessary in our survey of members' opinions to distinguish between Church teaching that is *de fide* and official but not infallible Church teaching. The latter has often been wrong in the past and been changed subsequently, and we do not see why any society of Catholics should be bound to affirm it in its constitution. Where *de fide* teaching is concerned, however, the assumption must surely be that all Catholics accept it by virtue of being Catholics, so there is no need for it to be explicitly set out in a constitution. The very demand is an implicit accusation that the people concerned are not in full communion with the Church.

Third, it is an unjust demand if it is applied only to *Quest*. A similar demand should be made of all Catholic societies. Thus societies for separated and divorced Catholics should be required, in their constitutions, to affirm their adherence to Canon 915 and agree that it applies to them. Moreover, societies for married people, such as the Union of Catholic Mothers, should similarly be required to state explicitly that they hold contraception to be gravely immoral. To our knowledge, no such demands have ever been made. We should like to know why *Quest* has been singled out for this treatment; in our view, justice demands even-handedness with regard to both homosexual and heterosexual people.

By contrast, what *does* seem reasonable to us is that members of a Catholic organisation should, in the course of its meetings, become fully acquainted

with official Church teaching, both *de fide* and not infallible, on topics germane to the aims of the organisation. We can assert without any hesitation that *Quest* fulfils this role. Precisely because the Church's official but not infallible teaching on sexuality is controversial in modern society, it is frequently discussed at local group meetings and in *Quest* publications. It is extremely unlikely that anyone could remain a member of *Quest* for long without becoming well-informed about it. This seems to us a more responsible approach to official but not infallible Church teaching than a demand for acceptance of it as a condition of membership.

The Cardinal gave 5 main reasons for the temporary suspension of an entry for *Quest* in the *Catholic Directory*. The first was that a clause in the section of *Quest's* Constitution that lists its aims 'is so ambiguous as to leave it unclear whether *Quest's* constitution as a whole is consistent with the teaching of the Church'. The clause specifies part of *Quest's* aim as 'associating lay men and women who are seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships'. At the meeting between him and the Chair of *Quest* on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1994, he specified the phrase 'the full expression of their homosexual nature' as the source of the ambiguity. Writing to the Chair of *Quest* on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1997, he was concerned that 'lack of adequate interpretation' of this clause 'reveals a consistent endeavour to "seek" ways of rationalising homosexual practices with the teaching of the Church, ... while ... being unwilling to face up to the fact that such rationalisation is not achievable'.

Writing on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1994, the Chair assured him that *Quest* 'does not give approval to a "full expression" extending to "genital acts between two men"' (the Cardinal's phrase). The Chair had previously (in a letter of 20<sup>th</sup> August) written that the reconciliation of which the constitution speaks 'is a judgment to be made only by the individual for himself and not by *Quest*'. So 'does not give approval' simply means that *Quest* as such has nothing to say on the matter, because it is not its business. However, the situation today is affected by the recent survey. The responses to question 6 show that a large majority of members think that sex outside marriage is not always wrong. We have been asked to reply on behalf of the membership as a whole, so this is the position we must adopt. In this we are supported by several theologians, so it must at the very least be controversial whether this position is inconsistent with any *de fide* teaching of the Church.

The second reason was that in the Survey of Members in 1995, 80% of 116 respondents thought that the expression of same-sex love within a personal relationship was entirely compatible with their Christian faith, and that the editor of *Quest Chronicle* had asserted that the report on the Survey 'amounts to a statement from *Quest*'. The Cardinal omitted what followed, which specified the statement made by the survey as 'witnessing to the lived experience and living faith of those who are gay and lesbian and Catholic', so that 'it usefully contributes to debate among Christians about the truth and

meaning of human sexuality'. In context, therefore, this was not claiming that the survey committed *Quest* to holding that the expression of same-sex love within a personal relationship is entirely compatible with Christian faith. But this year's survey puts beyond question that a large majority of respondents hold, first, that sex outside marriage is not always wrong; second, that arguments heard to the contrary are unconvincing; and third, that if, where teaching is official but not infallible, one is unable to agree with Church authorities who say that a certain action is wrong, one can go ahead and do it in good conscience (see Survey Report for details). If a reply be required on behalf of the membership as a whole, and whether with regard to homosexuality or heterosexuality, this must be it.

The third reason was that the committee's motions at the Twickenham Conference in 1998 to amend the Constitution were defeated. In particular, the Cardinal regretted that it was not made a purpose of *Quest* to encourage acceptance of the need to live chaste lives in accordance with the Church's teaching, because 'this would have removed, once for all, the ambiguities in the constitution'. In our Survey, however, we found it necessary to distinguish no less than three senses of 'chaste', two of which occur in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, although they do not appear to be mutually consistent. In the event, a large majority of respondents to the survey rejected this as a purpose of *Quest* where 'chaste' means 'with no sexual activity', a bare majority agreed with it where it has the traditional sense of temperance in sexual activity, and a large majority where it means 'integrating one's sexuality with the rest of one's personality and into relationships with other people' (see Survey Report for details). The amendment proposed in 1998 was defeated by a majority of 70%, not by a small majority as the Cardinal thought. The reasons of individual members for rejecting it [must remain a matter for speculation, but] [were various, but a prime consideration was that] the wording of *Quest's* purpose had been received by ecclesiastical authority for almost a quarter of a century and had not been found unacceptable when *Quest* was listed in the 1992 *Catholic Directory*

The fourth reason is that the cumulative effect of the revisions to *Quest with the Church* issued after the Twickenham conference strongly suggested that *Quest* had moved away from a clear acceptance of the authority of the Church's teaching. No detail is given to substantiate this charge. Cardinal Hume identifies nothing in *Quest with the Church* to support his view of it. He was unable to do this because the document has much to say supportively for a right understanding of the church's teaching. It says that *Quest* 'has always worked in accordance with the understanding of Catholic teaching and the pastoral guidelines provided in *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*,' published by the Social Welfare Commission of the Bishops' Conference in 1979. This remains broadly true, and hardly expresses abandonment of Church teaching.

The fifth reason is the Press Release following the Bath Conference in 1999, in which a distinction between 'friendships' and 'partnerships' in adopting as

an aim for the subsequent year 'to foster friendships among its members and to encourage and recognise loving same-sex partnerships' would lead most people to conclude that the latter include a sexual relationship. More accurately, perhaps, 'that the latter *may* include a sexual relationship'. Otherwise the implication is correct. It does not mark any change of policy, however, and appears to be consonant with *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People* (1994, pp.10–11). Our press release did not include the sentence 'Objectively, this is morally unacceptable'.

The rest of Cardinal Hume's letter was not included in the public statement 'concerning the omission of *Quest*, the support group for homosexuals, from the 1999 Catholic Directory', issued by the bishops' conference on 2 March 1999 (*Briefing*, March 1999)

The Cardinal summarised his position by hoping that *Quest* could soon be re-entered in the *Catholic Directory*, but imposed two conditions. The first, that the alleged ambiguity of the constitution be resolved by an amendment making clear that part of the main purpose of *Quest* is to encourage its members to an acceptance of the need to live chaste lives in accordance with the Church's teaching. The second, that the press release about encouragement and recognition of loving same-sex partnerships be revised. It is clear from the results of the Survey that, even if the committee were minded to propose a change to the constitution on the lines demanded by the Cardinal, there is no chance that the membership would approve it. As to the Press Release, that was a report about the conference proceedings issued by a former committee over a year ago that could hardly be altered retrospectively, nor do we see the need to do so, for the reason given above.

# LETTER

## to the secretary of the bishops' conference

Dear Monsignor Roche,

In your letter of 31st March 1999, you said that the Bishops' Conference would be willing to consider my request for a meeting once it had seen a full response to the points raised in the late Cardinal Hume's letters to me of 11<sup>th</sup> September and 28<sup>th</sup> October 1998. You added that 'Such a considered response would need to be on behalf of the whole membership of Quest, following due consultation.' I am glad now to be able to provide that response, which, in addition to this letter, comprises:

- 1 a copy of the results of the MEMBERSHIP SURVEY conducted by the committee of Quest earlier this year. (The very full survey asked the members' views on a range of issues, and we were careful to include all the matters raised by the late Cardinal).
- 2 an account of the discussion of the results of the survey held at the Quest Conference 2000 in Leicester.
- 3 a response to the 5 points raised by the Cardinal in his last letter.

Our recent correspondence was in the context of the suspension by the Bishops' Conference of *Quest's* listing in the *Catholic Directory*. That decision was taken without prior notice to *Quest* and without giving *Quest* an opportunity to state its case for remaining in the *Directory*. Although that cannot be regarded as a just procedure, and some remedy needs to be sought, I should regard it as more profitable to bury contentious issues from the past, for the benefit both of *Quest* and of the Church. We believe that there are several issues on which a dialogue with the bishops' representatives would be beneficial, and that the question of an entry in the *Catholic Directory* should not be allowed to obscure other and perhaps more important ones. We should, nevertheless, like it to be an item on the agenda.

It is clear from the survey that a large majority of *Quest* members does not accept some of the Church's current teaching on homosexuality and wants *Quest* to work for change in it. In this, as more than one bishop has remarked to us, homosexual Catholics differ little from heterosexual Catholics in finding themselves unable to accept some of the current teaching on sexuality. We believe, however, that this dissent is limited to teaching that is, though official, not infallible, and that our members are committed to teaching that is *de fide*. Where there are only differences of this kind, *Quest* hopes to remain on good terms with the bishops.

In now asking for a meeting between representatives of the Bishops' Conference and representatives of *Quest*, we are looking to a future in which our members, as lesbian and gay Catholics, can give the bishops that lay assistance which the *Catechism* regards as 'so necessary that, for the most part,

the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it' (§900). There are two areas in which this necessity seems most obvious and urgent.

The first is the pastoral care of homosexual people. In spite of the guidelines given by the bishops, lesbian and gay Catholics remain very often lonely and isolated in their parishes. Many, in consequence, have lost touch with the Church. They have come to believe that being lesbian or gay is incompatible with being a Catholic and that any attempt to combine them will merely result in negative, destructive self-images. They know neither of the *Catechism's* call to treat them with 'respect, compassion and sensitivity' (§2358), nor of Cardinal Hume's generous understanding of that teaching.

Second, there is the prospect of government legislation to improve the position of homosexual people in society. On this, Church teaching is widely misrepresented. Its opposition to injustice and discrimination, 'every sign (of which) in their regard should be avoided' (*Catechism*, §2358), is not heeded. Cardinal Hume's application of this principle in criteria for responding to proposed changes in the law is rarely cited (*A Note on the Teaching of the Catholic Church concerning Homosexual People*, revised edition, April 1997, §13). This, surely, is an area in which an effective apostolate demands consultation between the bishops and a group such as *Quest*, before public statements are made.

This letter, together with the enclosures listed above, represents a considerable effort by the members of my committee, who hope to demonstrate by this response the seriousness of our desire to foster good relations with our bishops. Cardinal Hume's letter of 28th Oct 98 concluded by emphasising 'very strongly that the Church's pastoral concern for all the members of *Quest* remains undiminished.' We very much hope that this is still so. I look forward, accordingly, to your confirmation that our request for a meeting with bishops having relevant Conference responsibilities will be laid before the standing committee of the Bishops' Conference in October and before the Conference itself in November.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Keal, Chair of *Quest*

## EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT

According to a recent report in the *Catholic Herald* (24th November, 2000), a committee of the Bishops' Conference is presently drawing up criteria for entries in the *Catholic Directory*. This may, perhaps, explain the long silence since *Quest* heard from Mgr Roche on 12th October. If so, it does not bode well for any prospect of a genuine dialogue with representatives of the Conference. It seems, rather, that in the usual authoritarian spirit, criteria are being drawn up without consultation, so that Catholic societies may be faced with a *fait accompli* that will avoid the necessity of face-to-face discussion. There is much clerical *talk* about dialogue, but little conception of what it means in practice. Do the bishops really just want an obedient Church in which no one is to think for himself unless his thoughts are those of the bishops?

The gap between clerical theory and clerical practice has been a noticeable feature of recent dealings between Church officials and gay Catholics. On the one hand, we have been told that we are to be treated with compassion, that unjust discrimination against us is to be eschewed (though, of course, what the victim considers unjust, the perpetrator may not, so that is a convenient let-out when it comes to actual instances) and that any suggestion that Church officials want to drive gay Catholics out of the Church is simply malicious. At the same time, when any legislation or other arrangements that would make life easier for gay people is proposed, one can almost guarantee that some Church official will oppose it.

Certainly the message that has come over loudly in the last few months is that gay people are not wanted in the Church. To quite a large extent that can be laid at the door of Cardinal Winning, whose intemperate remarks have not been calculated to win gay friends and influence them. Of course the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales cannot be held responsible for Cardinal Winning's behaviour, but some of them have provided him with a background chorus, if more politely expressed.

Laing and Esterson argued almost 40 years ago<sup>1</sup> that conflicting messages of this type lay behind schizophrenia in many families: the parents keep telling the child how much they love him/her, but constantly act in the opposite sense. Gay Catholics, being already adult or almost so, are not likely to develop schizophrenia as a result of their treatment by Church officials; but they *are* likely to call it a day as far as the institutional Church is concerned and, in my experience, that is exactly what is now happening. For every practising gay Catholic I meet these days, I come across at least ten 'post-Catholics', in various degrees of disaffection with clergy and parishes.

*Quest* has tried, over the years, to bring marginal Catholics into closer contact with the institutional Church, and to preserve the links between priests and people. That is becoming increasingly difficult, though Mr Cunliffe's documentation shows that some bishops have appreciated our attempts. Most local *Quest* groups struggle rather than flourish, but there is

little evidence that potential members are flocking instead to organisations that toe the Vatican line to the letter. Of course, the gay issue is only one aspect of a much more widespread Catholic revolt against Vatican tyranny.

It poses, nevertheless, a dilemma for the bishops. Are they pastors, or managers? Originally, they were the latter: 'episcopos' means 'supervisor' and they were appointed so that the apostles could get on with their work unfettered by managerial concerns. But as the apostles died out, the bishops came to be accepted as their successors<sup>2</sup>. There remains an inherent tension between the two roles, though, and it becomes acute when the Church (that's us) and Church officials drift apart. The bishops cannot be unaware that European Christianity appears to be in terminal decline; they must know, in their heart of hearts, that the public face of the Church must change drastically if it is to have any hope of attracting people once again. Yet their managerial concerns, apart from the drain on their time and energy, are a constant temptation to earn brownie points with the Vatican and damn the pastoral consequences. These are reinforced by a lingering ultramontanism and a doctrine of loyalty that, to my mind, is quite immoral: 'my Church, right or wrong' is even more vicious than 'my country right or wrong'.

Well, we wait for a sign. When Henry VIII demanded the bishops' assent to the Royal Supremacy, 17 out of 21 capitulated without a murmur<sup>3</sup>. Now, Papalism rather than monarchy is the threat; when one institution of the Church grows out of balance with the rest, there is trouble. Today we have an overweening, centralised papacy, badly out-of-touch with some parts of the Church, notably in Europe and north America. Can we count on our bishops now any more than when Henry, rather than the Vatican, was the tyrant?

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1 Laing, R. D., and Esterson, A., *Sanity, Madness and the Family*; vol. 1: *Families of Schizophrenics*. London, Tavistock Publications, 1964.

2 Brown, Raymond E., *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, chapter 8., pp. 124–146. New York, Paulist Press, 1981.

3 Hughes, Philip, *The Reformation in England*, vol. 1, p. 272, n. 2. London, Hollis & Carter, 1950..