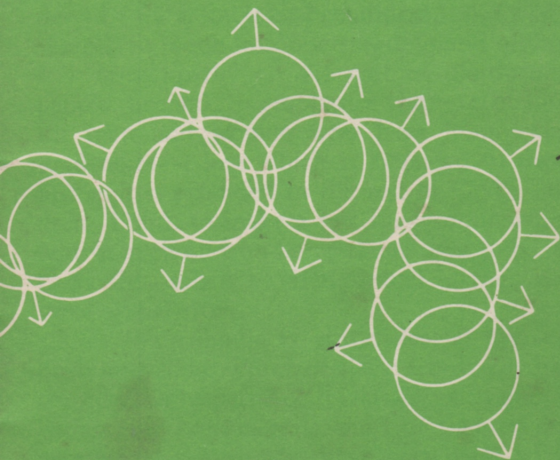


Christian words to a

Homosexual



W. Norman Pittinger

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CHRISTIAN WORDS TO A HOMOSEXUAL

These words are addressed to men and women who either are or think they are homosexuals. They are also addressed to other people who wish to understand homosexuals.

The writer has three purposes. First, to describe the homosexual condition about which there is so much misunderstanding and often a lack of sympathy on the part of ill-informed people. Second, to emphasize the love of God for men and women who have homosexual tendencies—a love which is extended to them just as it is extended to the rest of God's children. Third, to make a few suggestions which may help those who know themselves to be, or think they might be, homosexual in their personal sexual drive.

One thing should be made clear at the very beginning. The writer of these words has had considerable experience in talking with and in counselling homosexuals, most of them young people but others who have been well on in age. He cannot take towards them the negative and condemnatory attitude which has so often been characteristic of Christians—characteristic, too, of many who do not profess the Christian faith. Homosexuals have been made to suffer in countless ways: through social ostra-

cism, through genuine persecution, through police action, through rejection by church groups, and through a failure on the part of many even to attempt to understand the dynamics of homosexual personality. But a Christian must believe that the Church of Christ exists for the purpose of bringing to every human being an awareness of God's love, disclosed in Christ. He must also believe that it is the duty of the church, through its ministers and lay people, to accept all God's children as brothers and sisters. So a homosexual is a person to be helped, not rejected; to be welcomed into the Christian fellowship, not refused entrance; and always to be treated as one who is loved by the God whom Christians profess to worship and serve.

If the non-homosexual who happens to pick up this booklet cannot make that attitude his own, he is very likely to be infuriated by the words here addressed primarily to the homosexual. He may think that what is being said is too "permissive," perhaps "immoral." But in that case, let it be said in all humility, judgment is on that reader. "Let him that is among you cast the first stone," said Jesus to those who were prepared to pelt a woman taken in adultery "in the very act." *All of us*, without exception, have fallen short of God's will for us; *all of us* violate the loving relationship with God which is reflected in our relationships with other men and women. Hence *all of us* are sinners. The homosexual is in no worse case than any other

human being. The only difference between him and others is that his sexual interest and instincts are directed towards persons of his own sex, rather than to those of the opposite sex. What this means we shall be discussing in a minute. But it does not mean that the homosexual is less than human, other than human. If he is a sinner, then so are you and I. Everyone of us needs to know and accept the love of God; everyone of us needs God's forgiveness, his compassion, and his help. If people who are not homosexually inclined will only acknowledge that they need these things for themselves, they will also have to acknowledge that they must offer this love, acceptance, forgiveness, and help to their fellows who happen to find their only possibility of love in a person who belongs to their own, and not the other, sex.

What is the homosexual condition?

In the briefest terms, it is the condition of those who find themselves strongly attracted to members of their own sex. The great majority of men and women are drawn towards and sexually stimulated by a person of the other sex. "Boy meets girl; boy falls in love with girl." That is the way it usually happens. But there are a considerable number of men and women whose interest is the other way. A man feels drawn to, interested in, and sexually stimulated by another man; a woman is in the same position in respect to another woman.

Not all of those who feel this attraction or have this tendency act upon them. Probably a very great many never do. The thought of physical contact of that kind is repugnant to them. Yet they prefer to be with persons of their own sex and very often they develop deep affection, much more intense than ordinary friendship, for another man or woman. On the other hand, a not inconsiderable number want very much to have some kind of physical contact with the person of their own sex with whom (as we must phrase it) "they have fallen in love." Sometimes they do have such contact. It is not necessary to describe here what such people may "do" with one another, except to say that in general their relationship may include all the usual ways of sexual contact save that one which is possible only between a man and a woman.

How many people fall into the general category of homosexual? How many people are "in" the homosexual condition, whether they act upon it or not? The answer depends on many factors and in any event is not susceptible of precise statement. Sociologists in the United States and Great Britain have estimated that something like five per cent of the total population in those lands might be included. Some have suggested a larger percentage; one expert has said that about ten per cent have homosexual tendencies but only four or five per cent—half of the ten per cent figure—

have ever acted in an explicitly homosexual fashion.

On any reckoning, however, even the lower figure is not inconsiderable. It would mean that in the United States, with a population nearing two hundred million, there must be something like ten million homosexuals; in Britain, two and a half million. If these seem unexpectedly large numbers, the answer may be that very few of us can easily identify a homosexual when we see one. After all, he is not very different from anyone else in most ways which appear on the surface to the ordinary observer. It is only in his specific sexual drive that he is different. Despite a popular idea, very few male homosexuals are of the effeminate type—the “pansy” or “fairy,” as the phrases go. Very few female homosexuals are “butch” or highly masculine in manner and appearance. Nor is it true that homosexuals are found only in the “arty” professions. As one expert has remarked, your banker or your doctor, your secretary or your teacher, even your pastor (for clergymen are not miraculously exempt from homosexual drives), may feel this deep attraction to his own sex. So may a truck-driver or a brick-layer.

Perhaps at this point it may be useful to point out that the word “homosexual” does not mean, as many think, “lover of men.” The word comes from two ancient terms, one Greek, the other Latin; it is a mixture of two languages. *Homo* in the compound is not from the Latin *homo* which means “man.” It is from the

Greek *homo* which means "the same." "Sexual" is of course from the Latin *sexus* whose meaning is obvious. Thus a homosexual is a lover of the same (his own) sex, while a heterosexual is a lover of the other (Greek *hetero*) sex.

For a long time homosexuals, especially men, have been regarded with contempt, sometimes disgust, by those who do not share his sexual drive. His lot has been made very difficult because of this attitude. The female homosexual has had an easier time, for some reason; and the law has taken little if any notice of her. But for the male, the law has been very severe, especially in the matter of overt sexual acts. In most states of the American Republic this is still the case; only one, Illinois, has recently removed homosexual acts from the category of crime. In England the present law is fairly liberal; with certain exceptions, homosexual acts "between males of twenty-one years and over, when performed with mutual consent and in private" are no longer matters for criminal action. This change was made after the presentation of the famous Wolfenden Report, in which a royal commission carefully evaluated the situation of the homosexual in society and urged that he did not constitute a social menace, as had once been thought. In Canada the law has also been liberalized. In many other countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, Holland, France, and Italy, there has never been such legal condemnation.

In view of the legal situation in the United

States, a male homosexual must be very careful indeed if he is not to run the risk of arrest and severe punishment, should he and a partner be apprehended by the police. His physical expression of sexual interest is a crime in the eyes of the law, save in Illinois; even there, other kinds of criminal offense may be charged against him if he is "caught in the act." It ought to be noted, however, that nowadays there is a growing tendency for a more liberal or permissive attitude, even among the police in large cities. Very likely, within a few years time most of the harsh laws will either be repealed or amended. To this end, a number of churches in America have been working, through various official boards and agencies, for such a relaxation—not because they approve of homosexuality but because they are convinced that the way homosexuals have been treated has been unjust and unfairly discriminatory.

A great deal of research has been carried on to discover the origins of the homosexual drive. But so far scientists have come to no real agreement on the subject. Doubtless early family influence, perhaps certain physical factors of a congenital sort, and certainly environmental pressures are part of the picture. But what is clear, thanks to such investigations as those which we associate with the name of Dr. Kinsey, is that a very large number of men and women (particularly men) have had some overt homosexual experience at some time in their lives, usually when they were young. Most do

not continue; some do. Those who do cannot be held up as objects of scorn and contempt; they are what they are, for whatever reason, and they must be respected as human beings whom others should try to understand. Whether they are "latent" homosexuals, who never act on their desires, or overt ones, who do, they are human beings. On this all the experts in sexual matters are agreed.

It is inaccurate to say that all homosexuals are "out to seduce others," especially children and adolescents. Recent studies have proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that this is not the case. Most homosexuals are attracted to persons of their own age or very slightly younger; very few indeed are drawn to young children or adolescents. Adolescents themselves may engage in homosexual acts with one another; but that is a different matter. The truth is that homosexuals and heterosexuals are alike in this respect, the experts tell us; only those with some deep personality defect are likely to seduce those of tender years, whether they are male or female.

Finally, the homosexual condition is very human in one respect if in no other. Like every other man or woman, the homosexual wants to love and to be loved. So do all of us—it is the mark of our human nature to desire to love and to receive love from others. A Christian should recognize that this is a part of God's "image" in us. God is Love, as the First Letter

of St. John tells us. He is yearning, passionate, seeking, active Love. He has made us men *for* love and he has made us *to* love. He intends that everyone of his human children shall become a "lover," one who gives himself to, is concerned for, and seeks loving relationship with, others of his race.

A celebrated English Quaker pamphlet on the subject has dared to remark that one reason for homosexual prostitution and promiscuity, which are inescapable facts in the general homosexual situation, is that because homosexual's kind of love is so widely rejected or condemned, the possibility of establishing a socially approved long-time relationship with another so nearly impossibly difficult, the only way in which he can experience even the facsimile of love is through these unhappy means. It is not sheer physical lust which motivates him, so much as it is the "deep down desire" to love and to be loved. That is why he seeks another, hoping to find relief from loneliness and fulfilment of self. Alas, the results are usually tragic. But they are not very different from the similar case of the heterosexual who engages in promiscuous acts or uses a female prostitute, because he cannot find (or thinks he cannot find) *real* love. It is *real* love, however, that alone truly satisfies and fulfils a human being: faithfulness, mutuality, sharing, union of soul and mind and body, where each partner can give all of himself and each can receive all of the other.

God loves the homosexual just as much as he loves the heterosexual, because God loves *all* his children, without respect to race or color or class or education or position or sex—and without respect to the particular sexual drive which is theirs. Certainly no Christian could deny this; but not all Christians have acted or do act upon it.

A homosexual once said to the writer, "I have always had a deep faith in God, but sometimes I've wondered if God had any faith in *me*." When asked to explain what he meant, he replied, "Because so many people who call themselves Christians just reject me, and don't even try to understand what makes me tick." How tragic this was! But it shows how the attitudes taken by Christian people can convey, or fail to convey, a truth that they all profess—that God is Love and that he loves everybody, has faith that they can become truly his sons, and works unfailingly towards that end.

What is even more important, God loves his children *before* ever they respond to him; it is his love which always comes first and awakens the response. In the New Testament saying, "We love because he *first* loved us," God forgives us *before* we are penitent; it is his assurance of forgiveness that comes first and awakens penitence in our hearts for our violation of his love for us. This is the way the Christian gospel puts it, whatever moralistic people may have said. The theological name for this truth is "justification by grace through faith"—we are

accepted by God and set right with him by his loving favor, to which we respond with the commitment of ourselves. Then we may "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." The Christian church is here to proclaim this gospel of God's love and forgiveness, to make the message come alive in human experience, and to bring all the sons of men to a living awareness of their common brotherhood and mutual responsibility.

God loves the homosexual, because he loves everybody.

The homosexual reader must be helped to understand this. Let us put it in this way: "God loves you, God cares for you, God wants you, just as you are and just where you are. You do not have to deny anything about yourself. All you must do is to respond to God's love and care and desire. Trust him, have faith in him, try to give yourself to him—no matter what others, including some church people, may seem to say and do. You belong to God. Think and act always on that great truth."

God does not care for his children because they are good or moral; he cares for them simply because they are his children, loved with a love that "will not let us go." So if you are a homosexual, try to make this trust in God's love as real as you can in your mind and heart and will. If sometimes you are in despair over your condition, God still loves you. If you have accepted your condition, God loves you. If after determining to avoid some unworthy act, some

promiscuous contact, you have failed to do what you intended, God loves you. If you are lonely because you can find nobody whom you can love with all yourself, God loves you. Thus the homosexual need never lose hope. He is always loved by the perfect cosmic Lover, the Love which, in Dante's words, "moves the sun and the other stars."

But is not homosexual love a sin, especially when it leads to physical contacts between persons of the same sex? For a long time people have said so; but nowadays an increasing number would talk in a somewhat different fashion. They would say that like so much in human life "it all depends." Certainly the homosexual condition is not sinful; it is just the way some people happen to be and for which they have no responsibility. Certainly loving another person, homosexually, is not sinful; we are all meant to love other people, even to love them intensely and passionately under certain circumstances. How about the physical contacts? Here Christian opinion differs. Probably most Christians and most Christian "moral theologians"—those who have made expert study of the principles of Christian behavior—would say that they are. Yet we find in almost every Christian church today, not least in the Anglican Communion, moral theologians and others who would disagree. They would say that when there is deep and real love between persons of the same sex, who intend to be faithful to each other, who wish to share their whole lives, and

who try to live in genuine mutuality, such physical contacts as may occur are not sinful at all—they are not only to be expected but for those who are homosexuals they are natural and normal. Those who talk in this way are not advocating easy permissiveness; they are trying to come to terms with facts. And they base their view on the Christian insistence that God is Love, that men are created to be lovers, and that for those who can love only in a homosexual way this loving, with its almost inevitable yearning for and joy in such contacts, it cannot be wicked and wrong to allow them.

Since there is this difference of opinion, among equally informed and responsible experts in Christian morality, it is incumbent upon us to accept the disagreement as a fact and to recognize the good faith and intention of those who differ from the position which any one of us might prefer. For the homosexual, anyway, this means that he can feel a sense of support on the part of those who take the second line. Furthermore, the various churches which have made official statements on the matter are tending nowadays to support the second line, although not always with enthusiasm and sometimes with a troubled conscience.

If you are a homosexual, what you want is real love. That love is marked by such qualities as tenderness, the desire for faithful sharing together, deep hope in another's possibilities and their realization, mutual giving-and-receiv-

ing, and an urgent yearning for a union of lives. It involves self-sacrifice, too, perhaps suffering in and with and for the loved person. The model for real love is the love of God himself, who in all our afflictions is afflicted, in all our joys rejoices, wants always to be in fellowship with his children, and in Jesus Christ identified himself to the full with our human lot.

But no *human* love is perfect, like God's love. We are finite and limited creatures who are tossed to and fro, who are weak and open to the whims and fancies of the moment. The real question to ask is not whether our love is perfect. Of course it is not. Only one Man loved perfectly; his name was Jesus Christ—he is our model and pattern as a lover, but at our best we cannot attain to his perfection. What we can do is ask ourselves *in what direction* our imperfect love is moving. Is it moving towards self-giving or towards possessiveness and self-seeking? Is it moving towards or away from increasing tenderness, faithfulness, hope, mutuality, and union of one with another person? If what I deeply want is in the direction of self-giving, tenderness, faithfulness, hope, and the rest, it is becoming more and more like God's love. If it is moving in the other direction, it is becoming less and less like God's love and hence less and less the kind of love which God intends for his children.

When any one of us is moving towards a reflection of God's love we know how unsatisfactory a substitute turns out to be. We know

that the substitute is not the real thing. Promiscuity or finding physical release through somebody to whom one pays money: that is not the real thing. The homosexual may feel himself driven to such expedients, but he is not truly content with them, deep down inside him. Especially when he understands how he wants so much to know *real* love, he finds these substitutes inadequate and destructive. Without a single exception, every homosexual with whom the writer has talked has admitted, sometimes reluctantly, that he is seeking this real love and that he is not genuinely happy about substitutes. In this respect the homosexual is like everybody else.

Having said all this, we conclude this section by urging the homosexual to try to relate himself to the Christian church in its worship and prayer and congregational or parish life. He need not flaunt himself as a homosexual. After all that is not the most important thing about him. The most important thing is that he is a man, God's child, who wants and needs God's presence and power and the unfailing assurance of God's love. One can hope that more and more parishes will be ready to accept a homosexual on these terms, welcoming him into the Christian fellowship, admitting him to the sacraments, and treating him as the brother in Christ that he is. The church is the community of those who are learning, slowly and painfully, to become lovers of God and of their brethren, by God's grace released into the

world through his Son Jesus Christ. If it is not that, then it is good for nothing and a disgrace to the One it calls Lord.

Finally, some suggestions which may be of help to those who know themselves to be, or fear that they may be, homosexual.

First, do not accept your homosexuality without questioning it. It may be that you are "going through a phase" rather than that you are in fact a homosexual. Try to associate with persons of the other sex. See if you enjoy their company, get along with them, and come to like them—maybe, even, come to love one of them. But if you have done this and still are convinced of your homosexuality, recognize it and accept it for what it is. Do not be ashamed of yourself. But do not glory in your homosexuality either. If there is nothing wrong about your being a homosexual, there is nothing in it either which makes you any better than a heterosexual. Facts are to be accepted, not made an occasion for boasting nor for flaunting oneself in the world.

Second, always remember that God loves you, just as you are. Remember, too, that he wants to help you become the very best sort of homosexual possible, not to be a cheap and vulgar type but a conscientious and responsible type. Since you know God loves you, try to take part in the life of some Christian church where that love is proclaimed and where others try to live by it. Christian worship and above

all the regular receiving of the Holy Communion will be a great help to you—do not deny yourself the privilege of taking part in them.

Third, strive always to be a responsible person. This means that you will not try to make other people homosexual, even if you could do so. Be careful not to put yourself in positions where you will be too strongly tempted to engage in activity that you know very well is an unsatisfactory substitute for real love. There are many aspects of life where we can control ourselves, since we are human beings who can say “No” as well as “Yes.” Christian faith, prayer, worship, communion, will help to strengthen you in this self-control.

Fourth, try to develop a close friendship with someone you esteem and who cares for you. Do not be afraid to do this. All close relationships can be dangerous, but that is no reason that they should be avoided. It may be that in this way you will find somebody whom you can love and who can love you. That will be a wonderful thing, uniting two lives in a relationship of real love. But do not push yourself forward; nobody can ever make somebody love him. Love is always a gift, for which we are grateful; it is never a reward which we can earn.

Fifth, about physical contacts. Here, as we have seen, Christian opinion is not unanimous these days. Some say that in close relationships of a homosexual type no contacts of any sort are permissible. Others say that they are permissible provided there is genuine love such as

we have described. You will have to make up your own mind about this. But here are some guide-lines which may be useful:

- Physical contacts which have no other purpose than the gratification of sexual desire can be harmful to you as well as to the person with whom you have them. This is because they are denials of personal integrity and the need to express real love. Hence they are to be avoided if possible. Further, even when the person whom you love and who loves you welcomes such contacts, be sure that they always are expressions of love between you. Never use your partner merely for selfish ends. Love is mutuality, personal relationship, and giving-and-receiving together.

- There is nothing wrong about having a body and having physical sexual desires. God has made us to be like that. We all have bodies, of course, but a very few people seem to have been able to transmute or transform their sexual desires so that they are expressed in other ways. These people are sometimes monks or nuns, sometimes "vocational celibates," as they have been called. Are you one of these? If so, act upon it, trying to find in other ways a release for sexual desire—in concern and care for the needy and in other modes of service. But if you do not have that vocation, remember that promiscuity, "one-night stands," and the like, can never really give you the love that you so deeply want and

need. You really know that, because you know that cheap gratification for sex alone is short-range, temporary, and very often leaves a bad taste afterward. But if you do succumb, God still loves you and will forgive you.

- If you do have physical contacts with one you love and with whom you would unite your life, be sure that they do express your total self, and be sure that they are as much desired by the other person as they are by you. Do not force yourself on another, against his desire or will. That is to cheapen a relationship, perhaps to destroy it altogether.

Sixth and last, remember always that you are meant to become a person who lives "in love and charity" with all men. We have said already that God intends us to grow up to be "lovers," reflecting his own great love. God wants each of us to be the best kind of lover possible for us. A love which is self-contained and limited can be a self-defeating love. Any relationship you have must be of the sort that spills over into genuine care and concern for other people too. We are all bound up together in what an Old Testament text calls "one bundle of life." All men are brothers under a common Father. We are loved by God; and our responsibility is to open our lives to his love, so that it can work more effectively in the world. Our pale, imperfect, and often distorted loving is but a reflection of the great heart

of love which faithful people call by the name God. Never forget that truth; never forget to be thankful for it, to rejoice in it, and to act on it.



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