

Queer Christian: The Catholic Homosexual *Apologia* and Lesbian/Gay Practice

Frederick S. Roden¹

This essay concerns recent positions on homosexuality taken by the Roman Catholic Church and places them with respect to historical documents engaging same-sex desire. Analyzing Aelred of Rievaulx's twelfth-century Spiritual Friendship, John Bloxam's 1894 "The Priest and the Acolyte," and Marc-André Raffalovich's 1896 Uranisme et Unisexualité, this essay offers perspectives on contemporary lay and ecclesiastical apologias, defenses, and critiques of homosexual behavior. The relationship between past and present locates the Christian churches' response to the modern homosexual as a historically developed—rather than permanently fixed—model of identity and action.

KEY WORDS: Aelred of Rievaulx; *Spiritual Friendship*; John Francis Bloxam; "The Priest and the Acolyte"; Marc-André Raffalovich; *Uranisme et Unisexualité*; Roman Catholicism; homosexuality.

Recent exchanges between Roman Catholicism and homosexual populations have been tense. In the past two decades, the American Roman Catholic lesbian and gay organization, Dignity, was evicted from churches of that branch of Christianity by a formal statement from Church hierarchy. In 1999, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) put an official stop to the ministry of Father Robert Nugent and Sister Jeannine Gramick, founders of a quarter-century old American organization that offered retreats and support as pastoral care for lesbian and gay Catholics, their families, and church ministers. Since then, Gramick and Nugent have been forbidden from publicly discussing their silencing. Nugent has complied, while Gramick has not. Vatican statements such as the 1999 *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* seek to regulate teaching and research in Catholic universities and seminaries. Those intellectual spaces often diverge from current rigid CDF interpretations of the Church's position on human sexuality.

¹Department of English, University of Connecticut, 855 University Drive, Torrington, Connecticut 06790; e-mail: FSRODEN@aol.com.

In the Anglican Communion, the Church was in danger of schism concerning issues of homosexuality following the 1998 Lambeth Conference. The American branch, the Protestant Episcopal Church, witnessed a heresy trial in the 1990s over the ordination of “practicing” homosexuals to the diaconate and priesthood. In 2000, conservative American bishops of the Episcopal Church attempted to unite with like-minded religious leaders elsewhere in the world to fight the growing acceptance of homosexuality in Anglicanism.

In the face of such controversies within the liturgical churches, there is nevertheless some validation of homosexual experience that is new. In 1997, the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops released a pastoral letter entitled “Always Our Children” (AOC) that argues for the support of lesbian and gay Catholics. A kinder, gentler take on the perspective of 1980s AIDS culture (“love the sinner, hate the sin”), this document speaks out against homophobia and hate crimes while viewing homosexual genital behavior as sinful. AOC was rewritten—made less welcoming to lesbians and gays—following a Vatican review in 1998. The text is now completely in line with the Church-approved organization for homosexuals: Courage. While not virulently pathologizing same-sex desire as many “ex-gay” ministries do, Courage teaches its members to cultivate chastity in friendship. However, if the expression of homosexual desire is always evil, can the orientation ever be anything but objectively disordered? Despite this hard line, a number of Roman Catholic dioceses have made public statements supporting hate-crime legislation.

Such seemingly contradictory messages have a strong historical basis in the Augustinian tradition that “disorders” human sexuality while it acknowledges the quality of life of the individual person. In this essay, I discuss what I call the first modern Roman Catholic *apologia* for homosexual orientation, Marc-André Raffalovich’s *Uranisme et Unisexualité*. In that 1896 sociological work, Raffalovich glorifies same-sex desire as a source of high culture in the West, and argues that “inverts” make the best priests.² For Raffalovich, the love between men extolled by Plato reaches its summit in friendship. Occasional lapses from this ideal are sins, but not grievous errors. Thus a layman asserts a theological argument, a queer gesture itself in the Catholic tradition.

Although Raffalovich’s ideas seem modern, Christian monks wrote in praise of religious same-sex love much earlier. One example is Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Spiritual Friendship*, a product of the classical revival and affective piety of the High Middle Ages. Written in the form of a dialogue, Aelred’s genre follows a Ciceronian precedent: it is a conversation between friends. His style inscribes the homosociality of late medieval English monasticism. In addition, John Francis Bloxam’s Victorian work, “The Priest and the Acolyte,” comes from a different

²“Invert,” a term coined by Victorian sexologist Havelock Ellis, describes individuals who invert “normal” sexuality by their attraction to their own sex.

male space: the university. The same-sex world of Oxford produced this short story of Catholic scandal. My discussion of Raffalovich will follow an evaluation of the Catholic homoeroticism written out of such earlier spaces.

Both Aelred and Bloxam took clerical orders. Their works follow existing literary forms. Raffalovich's case is different. A secular Jew who converted to Roman Catholicism, Raffalovich wrote *Uranisme et Unisexualité* in the emergent tradition of Victorian sexological prose that attempted to document and advise. If the nineteenth century produced modern sociology and the subcategory we call "sexology"—sexuality studies—the period also allowed laymen such as Raffalovich to claim particular voices. Raffalovich's *Uranisme et Unisexualité* is no more than vernacular homiletics: lay preaching. Neither a trained scientist nor a schooled clergyman, Raffalovich took it upon himself to chronicle and judge homosexual individuals and behaviors.

Raffalovich makes sharp divisions that are similar to later arguments about homosexuality. He maintains that there are "superior" and "inferior" inverters: essentially those able to transcend and sublimate versus those who cannot. Current Church teaching likewise distinguishes between the "good" and the "bad." The idealization of friendship allows Courage and "Always Our Children" to foster the view of homosexual acts as intrinsically wrong rather than morally neutral. In secular culture, the monogamous, long-term homosexual relationship is the ideal for political moderates and liberals. That same relationship is the most subversive for the conservative, for it validates a homosexual union in a manner that the one-night stand (which can be confessed and atoned for) does not. Lesbian and gay communities interrogate the heteronormativity of same-sex marriage. Meanwhile, Roman Catholicism promotes same-sex friendships that resemble such relationships while it denies the erotic component contained in them. At the end of 2000, the Vatican released a statement opposing legal recognition of same-sex unions. The response to John Boswell's (1994) *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* is exemplary of the complexity of the marriage issue. For the religious conservative, the suggestion that spiritual marriages based on same-sex desire may have been sacramentalized in the early Church gives scandal. In pastoral practice, devout gay Christians have been using the rites Boswell unearthed for their own same-sex unions. In the academy, scholars and historians remain divided on Boswell's interpretation of evidence.

Apart from secular life, homosexuality in the priesthood remains a much-debated topic. Donald Cozzens (2000) suggests that the increasing number of gay men in American seminaries is due in part to a mass exodus of heterosexuals after the Second Vatican Council. Cozzens notes that straight men may fear entering this gay profession. Mark Jordan (2000) queers the institutional Church in *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism*. He claims that men who know same-sex desire have always inhabited and controlled religious spaces. Now they arrive at seminaries after having come out as "gay" and having lived in

the secular world. Reports of AIDS among priests and those in religious orders elicit considerable cultural anxiety. The reality that Catholic clergy are sexual beings makes a fall-from-grace model easy to accept. The dichotomization of vocation versus homosexuality in the film "Priest" is compatible with the public model of the ordained.

Australian priest Maurice Shinnick (1997) has called being gay and Catholic *This Remarkable Gift*. His assertion is part of a larger Christian discourse that claims sexuality as a blessing rather than a damaging dis-order. The difference in Shinnick's title, however, is the suggestion that *homosexuality* might be viewed the same way. In theory, this belief is orthodox Catholic doctrine: a human being's attributes must be viewed as gifts of God. The crucial question is how they might be used. Desire must be regulated and directed into proper channels. Same-sex desires may be sublimated in friendship or nurturing behaviors. They cannot be given the same space that heterosexual desires, suitable for marriage and procreation, deserve.

Whether or not same-sex marriages were celebrated as Boswell (1994) claims, Christian writers throughout the centuries have praised holy unions of same-sex affectivity. So, for example, the Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx's twelfth-century treatise on *Spiritual Friendship* continues to be used to justify the chaste homosexual life. In 1980, Boswell called St. Aelred the "gay" abbot of Rievaulx (p. 222). Brian Patrick McGuire (1994a & 1994b) has written a lengthy essay on the awareness of same-sex desire in Aelred as well as a biography of the saint. Aelred has been hailed as a model for gay Christians. He is the patron saint of Integrity, the organization of lesbian and gay Episcopalians. According to Paul Halsall (1997), Boswell's discussion of Aelred prompted the Protestant Episcopal Church (ECUSA) to include Aelred's day among the lesser feasts of its calendar. The late twentieth century was not alone in finding same-sex desire in Aelred. His life, known through an 1844 *vita* written by John Dalgairns (1901) for John Henry Newman's *Lives of the English Saints*, provided a model of male friendship for Victorian men in monastic life.

Aelred's twelfth-century tracts exalt religious chastity. "Shall I say of friendship what John, the friend of Jesus, says of charity: 'God is friendship'?" (Aelred, 1977, 1.69). "'He that abides in friendship, abides in God, and God in him'" (Aelred, 1977, 1.70). Friendship is extolled as Divine in Aelred's (1962) *Mirror of Charity*, where John also appears. Under Aelred's leadership, particular friendships in the monastery were encouraged rather than discouraged. While Aelred's writings on friendship do not support homosexual acts, they do offer a suitable channel for celibate expression of same-sex desire.

Still, love in friendship has its dangers. Aelred (1977) poses: "Who, I ask, among men, especially among the young, is able to preserve his purity or restrain his sensual appetite without very great grief or fear?" (2.50). Boswell, McGuire, and Douglass Roby have all suggested an early crisis of male-male love in the

abbot. Despite this anxiety, Aelred's discourses on friendship celebrate emotional intimacy:

Your friend is the companion to your soul, to whose spirit you join and attach yours, and so associate yourself that you wish to become one instead of two, since he is one to whom you entrust yourself as to another self, from whom you hide nothing, from whom you fear nothing (1977, 3.6).

The depth of the union is emphasized. "He whom you love will be another self, if you have transformed your love of self to him" (Aelred, 1977, 3.70). In contrast to this lush indulgence, Walter Daniel (1951), Aelred's earliest biographer, observes the harsh carnality of Aelred's conversion. Approaching a state of compunction for sin, the soul focuses on its wretchedness, unworthiness, and hard-heartedness.

As opposed to such bodily suffering, Aelred's theology of friendship is amatory, all sweetness and light. The beauty of companionship opposes the ugliness of sin.

And so in friendship are joined honor and charm, truth and joy, sweetness and good-will, affection and action. And all these take their beginning from Christ, and are perfected in Christ. Therefore, not too steep or unnatural does the ascent appear from Christ, as the inspiration of the love by which we love our friend, to Christ giving himself to us as our Friend for us to love, so that charm may follow upon charm, sweetness upon sweetness and affection upon affection. And thus, friend cleaving to friend in the spirit of Christ, is made with Christ but one heart and one soul, and so mounting aloft through degrees of love to friendship with Christ, he is made one spirit with him in one kiss. Aspiring to this kiss the saintly soul cries out: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" (Aelred, 1977, 2.20–1).

For Aelred, human friendship precedes and prefigures ultimate union with Christ. It is crucial, however, that transcendence take place. Mundane love is not the end; it must be given up for God.

This ambivalent relationship is described in terms of physical contact. Aelred reflects on the mystical kiss that unites two friends: "in a kiss, two breaths meet, and are mingled, and are united. As a result, a certain sweetness of mind is born, which rouses and binds together the affection of those who embrace" (1977, 2.23). True union is spiritual, not physical. The spiritual kiss between two friends is made

by the affection of the heart; not by a meeting of lips but by a mingling of spirits . . . I would call this the kiss of Christ, yet he himself does not offer it from his own mouth, but from the mouth of another, breathing upon his lovers that most sacred affection so that there seems to them to be, as it were, one spirit in many bodies, and they may say with the profit [sic]: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Aelred, 1977, 2.26).

Aelred also alludes to the Song of Songs. The soul reflects on the spiritual kiss between friends, and ponders, "'Oh, if only he himself had come!' [and] sighs for the kiss of grace and with the greatest desire exclaims: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth'" (Aelred, 1977, 2.27). Aelredian spirituality, while carnal in metaphor, is ultimately orthodox in doctrine. After life is over, "the soul takes delight in the kiss of Christ alone and rests in his embrace, exulting and

exclaiming: ‘His left hand is under my head and his right hand shall embrace me’” (Aelred, 1977, 2.27). Thus, from this early example of affection and love in friendship, the desires of the body are spiritualized.

Aelred utilizes the loss of a beloved friend as a starting-point for his meditation. It is convenient to imagine a fully spiritual love when the object of affection is already gone from touch. Ivo, his inspiration, was no longer physically accessible. Still, memory of him remained. That was perhaps better than the presence of his actual body because it served him in prayer, meditation, and spiritual growth without offering temptation.

As in Daniel’s narrative of Aelred’s conversion, spiritual delights seem to depend on restraint. The remedy for carnal desire is discipline. Daniel observes that Aelred “scarce ever prayed without tears . . . Hence he extinguished with tears all the heat of carnal affections” (1951, p. xi). Historically, spiritual practice in the Christian tradition has required the regulation of carnal appetites. Even Daniel’s farewell to Aelred’s corpse demonstrates anxiety over the body of desire. “I was not able to restrain the kisses which I gave his feet, though I chose his feet lest feeling rather than pure affection should reproach me” (Daniel, 1951, p. viii).

Catholics who advocate homosexual celibacy often use Aelred’s romantic depictions of same-sex affection. Aelred’s restraint and renunciation, discipline and loss, can prevent dissident behavior. They can also lead to outbreaks of sexual acts that require further penance. Several late nineteenth-century texts offer additional perspectives on same-sex love in religious life. For example, while not likely to be invoked in Church discussions of homosexuality, John Francis Bloxam’s 1894 “The Priest and the Acolyte” is a classic pulp portrait of same-sex desire in the priesthood. The short story appeared anonymously in *The Chameleon*, an Oxford undergraduate magazine. Oscar Wilde had to answer to accusations of having penned it. Constructing forbidden love between a young clergyman and an altar boy, the man of the cloth argues for the “naturalness” of his homosexuality. Bloxam graduated from Exeter College, Oxford, in 1895, a few weeks after Wilde’s third trial. He later held a series of Anglican curateships in London. “His friends have described him as a remarkable influence on any boy with whom he came into contact. Being wealthy, Father Bloxam put many of them on the road to good careers” (Eglinton, 1966, p. 41).

The narrator of “The Priest and the Acolyte” warns:

When that most wonderful thing in the whole world, complete soul-absorbing love for another, suddenly strikes a man, that man knows what heaven means and he understands hell: but if the man be an ascetic, a priest whose whole heart is given to ecstatic devotion, it were better for that man if he had never been born (Bloxam, 1978, pp. 30–1).

Having fallen in love with his acolyte, the Anglo-Catholic priest grieves his state:

What he had endured during these five years of fierce battling with those terrible passions he had fostered in his boyhood, was it all to be in vain? For the last year he had really felt that all the passion was subdued, all those terrible outbursts of passionate love he had really

believed to be stamped out for ever. He had worked so hard, so unceasingly, through all these five years since his ordination—he had given himself up solely and entirely to his sacred office; all the intensity of his nature had been concentrated, completely absorbed, in the beautiful mysteries of his religion. He had avoided all that could affect him, all that might call up any recollection of early life (Bloxam, 1978, p. 32).

This priest did everything he was supposed to do. He sublimated his desire in religious life and attempted to control his passion. Still, it could not be contained.

Gossip and suspicion eventually overtake the man and boy. The rector finds the priest and his acolyte in each others' arms. In a conversation between the clergymen, the young priest articulates his beliefs about homosexuality. "There is no sin for which I should feel shame," he answered very quietly. "God gave me my love for him, and He gave him also his love for me. Who is there that shall withstand God and the love that is His gift?" (Bloxam, 1978, pp. 39–40). "It was love, perfect love: it *is* perfect love" (Bloxam, 1978, p. 40). The priest shapes a narrative of homosexual difference, a soliloquy that is both sermon and *apologia*.

I was at a big public school, as you know. I was always different from the other boys. I never cared much for games. I took little interest in those things for which boys usually care so much. I was not very happy in my boyhood, I think. My one ambition was to find the ideal for which I longed (Bloxam, 1978, pp. 40–1).

"I have always sought for love" (Bloxam, 1978, p. 41). Like Aelred's notion of a second self, the priest's argument for his desire is Platonic.

The rector asserts, sympathetically, "You should have married. I think that would have saved you" (Bloxam, 1978, p. 42). The young clergyman describes the "natural" compatibility of his homosexuality with human and moral nature in the speech to his superior:

You do not understand me: I have never been attracted by a woman in my life. Can you not see that people are different, totally different from one another? . . . One law laid down by the majority, who happen to be of one disposition, is only binding on the minority *legally*, not *morally* (Bloxam, 1978, p. 42, emphasis in original).

For me, with my nature, to have married, would have been sinful: it would have been a crime, a gross immorality, and my conscience would have revolted. . . . Conscience should be that divine instinct which bids us seek after that our natural disposition needs. . . . I have committed no moral offence in this matter; in the sight of God, my soul is blameless (Bloxam, 1978, p. 43).

The priest sees his love as spiritual: "he was the necessary complement to my soul" (Bloxam, 1978, p. 43). The story ends with the dual suicide of priest and acolyte, as they drink from a poisoned communion cup at Father's last mass.

Ellis Hanson (1997) has shown that the relationship between homosexuality and Catholicism at the turn of the century is much subtler than sensational turns in scandalous short stories. The *vita* of Marc-André Raffalovich, especially his relationship to John Gray, elucidates this phenomenon. Fr. Brocard Sewell, the late Carmelite priest and Nineties scholar, acknowledged homoeroticism in their religious life. Gray was both priest and aesthete. He embodied the open secret of

the homosexual clergyman. Celibate priests were coded effeminate in the nineteenth century, as the anxiety over Newman's circle demonstrates. To find an actual homosexual priest, however—as all historical evidence suggests that Gray was—is more troubling. The body of the priest can be queered, existing in the liminal space between the genitally-active and biologically-procreative male and female, each with its socially-effected markers of identity. Nevertheless, when the priest is the homosexual—the queer sexual transgressor of these categories—he is pathologized perhaps more than the layman because he has publicly performed all of the expectations of the open secret, negating its privacy. If the priest is identified as a homosexual but no evidence can be found to confirm that he is genitally active—breaking his vows—and if he fulfills his vocation admirably, then his body is all the more troublesome because it does not affirm the category of the pathological or sinful homosexual. The Roman Catholic Church has never officially prevented the ordination of chaste gay men. They offer the Church much in the way of service. Contemporary Catholicism is in crisis over homosexuality because same-sex acts have traditionally been viewed as behaviors, not identities. It is a new challenge to respond to the modern category of the homosexual [priest]. The celibacy of the Roman Catholic clergy poses different questions about sexual orientation and identification than among the laity. While publicly all men may be assumed to be heterosexual, the lack of genital expression of desire already locates the priest in a queer space.

John Gray was received into the Roman Catholic Church on February 14, 1890. He experienced a nervous collapse in late 1892. Raffalovich met Gray in November of that year (Sewell, 1983). Raffalovich provided him with financial and emotional support and forced him to break his ties with Wilde, who was financing the publication of Gray's volume of poems, *Silverpoints*. Raffalovich managed to renegotiate the *Silverpoints* contract and by 1893 had moved him to Park Lane (Sturgis, 1995). In a famous quip, Wilde proclaimed that Raffalovich “came to London with the intention of opening a *salon*, and he has succeeded in opening a saloon” (Wilde, 1962, p. 173n4, emphasis in original). He ridiculed the rich Russian Jew and criticized his poetry. Gray underwent a transition in mentors. Jerusha McCormack (1991) theorizes that Gray's friendship with Raffalovich was “sublimated into a kind of religious vocation” (p. 147).

Thus the “affair” with Raffalovich was transformed, not without pain and confusion, into a rare spiritual friendship sealed by their common conversion to Catholicism. Gray turned his aesthetic/decadent poetic mode into a poetry of private devotional exercise (p. 147).

Gray's nervous collapse was homosexual panic. In Raffalovich and Catholicism, he found an alternative form of male intimacy with a perhaps chaste mentor. Through Raffalovich, Gray found a means to transfer affection to the Divine Lover. Gray was ordained a priest on December 27, 1901. He went to Edinburgh, where Raffalovich joined him in 1905. There Raffalovich built St. Peter's Church for Gray, and established a residence a few blocks away.

Uranisme et Unisexualité (1896) takes its name from mid-nineteenth century arguments by a Hanoverian lawyer, Carl Heinrich Ulrichs, for the amelioration of homosexuality laws in Germany. The term “uranism” was coined in the 1860s when Ulrichs, under the pseudonym Numa Numantius, put forth the theory that homosexuality is a congenital abnormality, a condition caused by the accidental location of a woman’s soul in a man’s body. Hence the *urning* was born—adapted from Uranos in Plato’s *Apologia*—and the pathology of *uranismus* defined (Hyde, 1970, p. 164). Raffalovich’s conversion to Roman Catholicism and the publication of his *magnum opus* both occurred in 1896. These two actions are connected. Raffalovich’s conversion fulfilled his longing for an ideal male form that he had articulated in poetry for a decade. Catholicism offered him a romance with the perfect man, Jesus, just as it offered security. *Uranisme et Unisexualité* was a vehicle for explaining and even extolling the homosexual condition. Raffalovich did not have to negate his past life any more than Gray did. They could be transformed by the mystery of Christ’s presence. Inversion, rather than being criminalized as deviance, might be a variation to be celebrated, given proper channels and suitable outlets.

Uranisme posits the social function of the invert, the expression of his particular soul, and the sublimation of his desires into chaste friendship that can enable him to make worthwhile contributions to society. It was a radical text for its time. Raffalovich has been neglected as a significant figure of the culture of the 1890s. *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, although one of the major works published on homosexuality in the late nineteenth-century, has never been reprinted and is not available in an English translation. Raffalovich’s work as a post-Wildean homosexual apologist has been marginalized as much as he was as the foreign Jew, the would-be Aesthete. Raffalovich’s pastoral theology is similar to the current position of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. Rather than view this resonance as a clear indictment of the 1896 work’s lack of relevance, we may instead consider how a Catholic theology of homosexuality began to emerge following the articulation of homosexuality as an identity.

Raffalovich’s preface opens:

It is the duty and right of every well-balanced man to get a clear idea of the psychology of sexual inversion, congenital or acquired, of uranism and unisexuality, of the psychology of unisexual acts or tendencies. Unisexuality is very widespread today; it has always been so (1896, p. 11).³

“Unisexual” may be read as “homosexual” here. He concludes:

Every man, Goethe says, has the right to a philosophy that does not destroy his individuality, provided that it does not damage the individuality of others. This is psychological origin of philosophies. My study of certain manifestations of the sexual instinct rests on this indestructible axiom that is in my opinion indisputable (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 13).

³All translations from Marc-Andre Raffalovich, *Uranisme et unisexualite: Etude sur differentes manifestations de l’instinct sexuel* (Lyons: Storck, 1896) are mine.

Raffalovich begins his narrative in a manner that safely grounds him as a detached scientist. He advocates compassion and humanity in his text. “Inverts are not satisfied at all with the old explanation, of a feminine soul in a masculine body” (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 15). He attempts to provide more.

Early in the work, Raffalovich looks to history. He starts with the ancient world, affirming that “Plato always remains the sublime guide of superior men inverted from birth or circumstance” (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 29). “Intellectual and philosophical Greece, like Christianity, considered the sexual instinct and sexual acts as a means and not an end” (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 29).

Plato raises up the superior invert . . . If Plato has been accused of being dangerous, it is not for the superior invert who aspires to the mastery of himself and to the glorification of his tendencies and their purification; it is for the weak one who lets himself go, who believes himself capable of courage and virtue that he does not yet have or will never attain (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 30).

Raffalovich privileges the chaste over those who fall prey to sins of the flesh. Even the latter he views as weak, not irretrievably lost. He places Plato’s thought at the summit of cultivated homosexual life.

From a discussion of the Greeks, Raffalovich proceeds to historicize Christianity.

Christianity naturally did not change uranism, but over a very long period of time it permitted superior inverts to follow enthusiastically and devoutly the principle of Plato . . . [R]eligion especially attracted superior inverts. Virginity placed so high, or the love of one’s fellow man turned so sacred and so tender—the love of its young God naked and bleeding, disfigured and transfigured, torn and tearing—filled uranists . . . with an enthusiasm that is easy to understand and not yet extinguished today; and for the good of men perhaps it will never go out (Raffalovich, 1896, pp. 30–1).

Raffalovich applies such “inverted” devotion to the creation of art, in the literary production of the mystics.

The soul of man, made the fiancée of Christ, has over the centuries expressed its desire and its adoration in poetry and prose. Angelus Silesius, Friedrich Spe, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa, and so many graceful and illustrious others have languished in love on the breast of the Divine Lover. Hafiz may be compared with the “dark night” of Saint John of the Cross. One could read such poems and ignore what is in the spirit of the man who cries and kisses the feet, the hands, the merciful side, in a way that one does not ignore a lover that Krafft-Ebing places in *Psychopathia Sexualis* as suffering from sadism, masochism, and unisexuality. The literature of today dares only in such moments of sensual and sentimental defiance what the poets of divine love have cooed about and moaned over with delight (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 31).

While Raffalovich considers the religious seeker to be driven by eros, he does not reduce religious sentiment in that treatment. He asserts the boldness of the mystics who, in creating poetry on the love of God, articulate drives that are not raised anywhere else. Besides positing the connection between the holy and the sexual, he effectively queers those male religious writers who embrace Christ as lover. Raffalovich cites the very writers about whom Gray had translated or written

poems. Later in the text, he explores the relationship between body and soul in a discussion of the Spanish mystic John of the Cross. A favorite of Raffalovich and Gray, John's experience serves as a starting point for an argument about homosexuality in the Church.

Raffalovich defines the celibate religious life as ideal for the "superior invert."

The celibate with his duties and his occupations and his devotions was a vocation for these ardent and desirous souls to elevate themselves to wisdom.

If one has studied the mystics, the sectarists, the doctors of the Church, one sees for the superior invert a wisdom, an elevation and a practice absolutely comparable to Plato but with greater devotion, and for the weak invert discipline.

The history of the great founders, the great religious, whatever their age or flavor of faith—Gordon, for example—teaches us much about the psychology of inversion and education (Raffalovich, 1896, pp. 31–2).

The "gifted" homosexual utilizes Platonic philosophy for the exploration of the sensual love of God.

Having located inverts within the Church, Raffalovich goes on to trace their history of oppression. "If Christianity opened itself to receive inverts, to help them, absolve them, save them—it became at the same time a pretext for persecution. Each sect that broke away was accused of sodomy" (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 31). The same Church derived benefit from superior inverts.

[I]nversion is not contrary to the sexual instinct . . . The Catholic Church has, of course, understood that inversion is often less scandalous than heterosexual sexuality . . . [The Church] must be the depository of good returns for the education of inverts, and it must even today choose as priests preferably superior inverts who are chaste, devout; then the heterosexuals who have broken with the world or who have the strength of character necessary; the coarse invert must naturally be one of the greatest dangers to a poor religious institution (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 32).

To place the homosexual—in other texts of the period pathologized as insane or criminal—in the highest position of moral life is extraordinarily elevating. Nevertheless, the less than chaste invert is demonized as particularly threatening.

However much Raffalovich may refer to classical antiquity as the primal site of male–male love, he repeatedly returns to the Roman Catholic Church as a point of reference.

When the Greek philosophers sought to display the superior psychological side of unisexuality, they wanted to show how in elevating oneself above a natural and instinctive tendency one could help oneself to the mutual improvement of all men; they wanted to give absolutely natural feelings coming from the very roots of humanity a sanction, a justification, an elevation that one can compare only to the point of view of the Catholic Church on marriage. Marriage is a sacrament; the end for marriage is continence and perpetuation of the race; it is for those who cannot attain perfect chastity, who cannot preserve their virginity, and who do not wish to burn with the desire for fornication (Raffalovich, 1896, p. 199).

In comparing chaste transcendence of homosexual feelings to Christian marriage, Raffalovich configures friendship as a holy union. The judgment that heterosexual

marriage is really for the weak—those who are not strong enough, as superior inverts are, to sublimate their erotic energy—is Pauline. Raffalovich’s conjugal bliss is no great celebration of marriage.

Greek philosophy . . . saw that inversion . . . was natural . . . [I]t wanted to demonstrate that . . . the ideal of chastity was not contrary to the ideal of continence, and that the ideal of continence could be attained by sensual man, at least to purify and ease his sensuality until he became capable of improving himself or improving another (Raffalovich, 1896, pp. 199–200).

The improvement of another in friendship serves as a fair alternative to heterosexual marriage. Raffalovich concludes his argument on male chastity with an assertion that the chaste uranist can better his civilization by not contributing to overpopulation or abusing womankind like many heterosexual men do. He can use his productive energies in the arts, sciences, or some other vocation.

Raffalovich and Gray seem to have entered into the special friendship that the amateur sexologist praises. Gray became a Roman Catholic priest, the highest accomplishment for the superior invert. Raffalovich describes some pathologies and abuses of Catholicism in *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, but his religiosity appears as sincere as his commitment to redeem the place of the invert in his culture. The relevance of the text to contemporary Roman Catholic politics of homosexuality has not gone unnoticed. In “*Uranisme et Unisexualité: A Late Victorian View of Homosexuality*,” P. W. J. Healy (1978) notes Raffalovich’s separation of the moral neutrality of same-sex orientation from a condemnation of homosexual behavior. Healy highlights the validation of the holy, chaste life for the homosexual and Raffalovich’s position that homosexuality is neither crime nor pathology. Healy has also published a short study of Raffalovich (1986). Both of these articles were printed in religious journals.

While some moral theologians look to the transcendent power of sexuality to touch the Divine, others continue to view homogenital sexuality as objectively disordered, even if they go so far as to see homosexual orientation as morally neutral. The 1997 Bishops’ letter, “Always Our Children,” is filled with homosexual-positive platitudes.

Respect for the God-given dignity of all persons means the recognition of human rights and responsibilities. The teaching of the Church makes it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression, and violence against them (NCCB, 1997).⁴

The document quotes the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that homosexuals “‘must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity’ (#2348)” (NCCB, 1997). It states that “‘Everyone . . . should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity’ (#2333)” (NCCB, 1997). Like Raffalovich in 1896, this late twentieth-century text highlights respect and assumes essentialism. “By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, because morality presumes

⁴This document is neither paginated nor otherwise subdivided.

the freedom to choose” (NCCB, 1997). The power of sexuality is acknowledged, but with an element of choice rather than Raffalovich’s innate willpower. “Like all gifts from God, the power and freedom of sexuality can be channeled toward good or evil” (NCCB, 1997). The message is that “you can help a homosexual person . . . encourage him or her to cooperate with God’s grace in order to live a chaste life” (NCCB, 1997). Finally, “The Church teaches that homogenital behavior is objectively immoral, while making the important distinction between this behavior and a homosexual orientation, which is not immoral in itself” (NCCB, 1997).

As in Raffalovich’s approach, friendship is the answer here. It is “a way of loving . . . essential to healthy human development, as well as one of the richest possible human experiences. Friendship can and does thrive outside of genital sexual involvement” (NCCB, 1997). Homosexual orientation is the given, while friendship is the correct choice. Hence while there is an element of policing, for “Always Our Children” states that the Church reserves the right to deny roles of service or leadership to persons “whose public behavior openly violates its teachings,” there is also an effort to support the chaste gay men and lesbians (NCCB, 1997). To ministers: “In various and subtle ways you can give people ‘permission’ to talk about homosexual issues among themselves and let them know that you’re also willing to talk with them” (NCCB, 1997). The heavy cross is called a gift to parents: “Your family now has an added opportunity to share love and accept love” (NCCB, 1997). And to the homosexual: “Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God’s love is revealed. You are always our children” (NCCB, 1997).

The rhetoric of this document uses more Victorian sentimentality than Raffalovich’s 1896 volume. The two texts taken together demonstrate an important phenomenon in modern Roman Catholicism: the role of the laity in the Church. The noted scholar Garry Wills, a Roman Catholic layman, published *Papal Sin* in 2000. His study is a scathing denunciation of Vatican insensitivity to suffering and oppression over the centuries. Wills (2000) takes on the Church in the Holocaust, women’s place in Catholicism, and the “homosexual question.” The obvious freedom of a lay scholar such as Wills or Mark Jordan (2000) hints at the amount of dissent that underlies forced clerical silence. Jordan writes:

Sodomy was and homosexuality is important in Catholic moral theology because it has been intimately connected to the exercise of power in the construction of priestly lives. It was one of the sites where moral regulation could be exercised purely, with a minimum of resistance. In this inner realm of churchly power, regulation could be exercised for regulation’s sake (2000, p. 82).

“It is safest all around for other clergy not to know. Secrets can be best kept by compartmentalization” (Jordan, 2000, p. 89). As in Raffalovich’s argument, Jordan

observes:

The priesthood and religious life are all-male institutions that reward vows of celibacy within a religion that demands celibacy of all homosexuals. If you have to be celibate anyway, why not get rewarded for it—and do it in the company of other men with similar inclinations (2000, p. 106).

He asks:

How do we judge today whether a priest is homosexual? Do we assign the identity “homosexual” when there are reported feelings, but no reported acts? When there are reported acts, but no reported feelings? When the clergyman in question denies both feelings and acts, despite evidence to the contrary? (Jordan, 2000, p. 108).

In the end, why do so many gay boys grow up to be priests?

Because they are promised an exchange of their anguished identity as outsiders for a respected and powerful identity as an insider. Because they want to remain in the beautiful, queer space of the liturgy. Because they are drawn to public celebration of suffering that redeems. Because they want to live in as gay a world as the Catholic church offers (Jordan, 2000, p. 159).

Jordan’s book is not an evaluation of homosexuality *and* the Church or homosexuality *in* the Church. It is a harsh indictment of the homosexuality *of* an institutional Church that takes shape in Jordan’s prose as a merciless, pathological hegemony harming gay and straight, male and female alike.

The public versus private space of queer Catholic identity is thus challenged. In public, the Roman Catholic Church can viciously attack homosexual people: from issuing a brief, as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops did in support of the Boy Scouts’ discrimination against homosexuals, to Vatican pressure on the city of Rome to withdraw support for the July 2000 Gay Pride festivities. Gay and lesbian Catholics constantly struggle with these offenses. Ultimately, forgiveness of a flawed institution may be extended. In 2000, the Jubilee year, Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness of those whom the Church had offended over two millennia. Homosexuals were noticeably absent from his list. In the days surrounding Epiphany 2001—the January 6 holiday celebrating the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus—American Roman Catholics publicly protested the Vatican. As Rome’s open door of the Jubilee year was literally closed in 2001, religious lesbians and gays appeared in St. Peter’s Square to demand greater openness in their Church. The “remarkable gifts” these queer Magi brought to the manger were photographs of themselves, forgotten by the institution that claims their salvation.

The queer Catholic *apologia* is neither apology nor explanation. It is not about finding ways to stay in the Church and pursue a “gay lifestyle.” Rather, this *apologia* concerns the articulation of a homoerotic voice whose very dissonance encompasses the queerness of Catholicism. On Yom Kippur 2000, American pop psychologist Dr. Laura Schlessinger asked forgiveness for the harm her statements against homosexuality may have caused. Queer Catholics cannot wait for the same

apology from the Roman Church. They must write such narratives for themselves, as many have done in the past.

REFERENCES

- Aelred of Rievaulx. (1962). *The mirror of charity*. Trans. G. Webb and A. Walker. London: A. R. Mowbray.
- Aelred of Rievaulx. (1977). *Spiritual friendship*. Trans. M. E. Laker. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Press.
- Bird, A. (1994). *Priest*. British Broadcasting Corporation.
- Bloxam, J. F. (anon.). (1978). The priest and the acolyte. In *The chameleon: A facsimile edition* (pp. 29–47). London: The Eighteen-Nineties Society.
- Boswell, J. (1980). *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era through the fourteenth century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boswell, J. (1994). *Same-sex unions in premodern Europe*. New York: Villard.
- Cozzens, D. B. (2000). *The changing face of the priesthood*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Dalgairns, J. (1901). Life of St. Aelred. In *Lives of the English saints* (pp. 53–210). J. H. Newman (Ed.), Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.
- Daniel, W. (1951). *The life of Aelred of Rievaulx*. Trans. F. M. Powicke. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Eglinton, J. Z. (1966). The later career of John Francis Bloxam. *International Journal of Greek Love*, 1(2), 40–2.
- Halsall, P. (1997). Calendar of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered saints. *Lesbian, gay and bisexual Catholic handbook*. Retrieved June 5, 1997 on World Wide Web: <http://www.bway.net/~halsall/lgbh/lgbh-gaysts.html>
- Hanson, E. (1997). *Decadence and Catholicism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Healy, P. (1986). André Raffalovich (1864–1934): A Sketch. *The Antigone Review*, 65, 37–42.
- Healy, P. W. J. (1978). *Uranisme et unisexualité*: A late Victorian view of homosexuality. *New Blackfriars* 59, 56–65.
- Hyde, H. M. (1970). *The love that dared not speak its name: A candid history of homosexuality in Britain*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Jordan, M. (2000). *The silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in modern Catholicism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McCormack, J. H. (1991). *John Gray: Poet, dandy, and priest*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press.
- McGuire, B. P. (1994a). *Brother and lover: Aelred of Rievaulx*. New York: Crossroad.
- McGuire, B. P. (1994b). Sexual awareness and identity in Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–67). *American Benedictine Review* 45, 184–226.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). (1997). Always our children: A pastoral message to parents of homosexual children and suggestions for pastoral ministers. Washington, DC: U. S. Catholic Conference.
- Raffalovich, M. A. (1896). *Uranisme et unisexualité: Étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel*. Lyon: Storck.
- Roby, D. (1977). Introduction. In Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual friendship*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Press.
- Sewell, B. (1983). *In the Dorian mode: A life of John Gray, 1866–1934*. Padstow, Cornwall: Tabb House.
- Shinnick, M. (1997). *This remarkable gift: Being gay and Catholic*. St. Leonards (NSW, AU): Allen & Unwin.
- Sturgis, M. (1995). *Passionate attitudes: The English Decadence of the 1890's*. London: Macmillan.
- Wilde, O. (1962). *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*. R. Hart-Davis (Ed.), New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Wills, Garry. (2000). *Papal sin: Structures of deceit*. New York: Doubleday.