

Fr. Perozich comments —

Some of the language is way too descriptive, yet incorporates quotes from ancient sources. I have cut them from the article, <https://www.newoxfordreview.org/documents/homosexuality-as-a-philological-problem/#> which requires the reader actively to choose to go to the website in order to expose them for reading. They are not necessary to the argument of the author, so while they belong to the article avoid them, please.

If you choose to look at them you are only satisfying your curiosity, not the studiosity necessary to understand the points of the author.

The highlights for me were:

- *The damage done by the introduction of the dubious term “homosexual” has been compounded by debasement of the term “sex.”*
- *In surrendering to this linguistic Blitzkrieg, the Church has caused herself myriad problems. Acceptance of the term “homosexual,” for example, has permitted dissenters from Catholic moral theology, such as Fr. James Martin, S.J., to suggest that condemnation of “homosexual acts” is tantamount to condemnation of “homosexuals” as a distinct kind of human being.*
- *By acquiescing in the term “homosexual,” the Church has permitted a group of men and women to define themselves in contradiction to the traditional Christian conception of human nature*
- *Equivocation about sexual morality is no favor to any of us sinners,*
- *We do owe an apology to the LGBTQ “community” — not because we have “targeted” them but because we have neglected to catechize them, to remind them in season and out that eternal salvation, as well as a fulfilling human life, depends on their living in accordance with their created nature and the commands of God.*

“HOMOSEXUALITY” AS A PHILOLOGICAL PROBLEM

ON THE DAMAGE BEING DONE
BY DUBIOUS TERMINOLOGY

By R.V. Young | [January-February 2020](#)

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Ed. Note: Please be forewarned that this article contains explicit references to sexual acts.

Last spring, *Crisis* published two articles that call into question the entire notion of “homosexuality” and the Church’s treatment thereof: “Highlighting Same-Sex Attraction Is a Mistake” by Peter Jerman (March 28) and “Male Homosexuality and Priestly Formation” by Adrian Reimers (April 2). “In the very use of the words ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual,’” Jerman writes, “we accept the corruption of ‘sexual’ and ‘sexuality.’ In using these words, the Church succumbs to the very corruption it must address and correct.” Reimers maintains, “There is no homosexuality.... If we are to address the ‘homosexual

problem' in the Church, then we must first understand what we are talking about, and whatever that is, it is not a thing called homosexuality.”

I believe that these arguments can be defended and buttressed by invoking evidence from philology — that is, the close study of words, their origins, and their relationships in written texts. Ignoring this evidence has created grave problems for the Church in her efforts to address what Reimers calls the “homosexual problem” and, indeed, the Sexual Revolution generally.

Neither the words “homosexual” or “homosexuality” nor their equivalents in any language known to me existed before the late 19th century. According to the most recent update in the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “homosexual” first appeared in 1869 in a book in German by K.M. Kertbeny, who was challenging a law criminalizing sodomy. Richard von Krafft-Ebing subsequently used the terms in *Psychopathologia Sexualis* (1886), which assays to treat sodomy not as a legal, moral, or spiritual issue but as a medical problem. “Homosexual” and “homosexuality” came into English in an 1892 translation of Krafft-Ebing’s work and were taken up enthusiastically by Havelock Ellis in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897). “Heterosexual” and “lesbian” (in the sense of a female “homosexual”) have similar etymological histories.

To be sure, men had been aware of perversions of normal sexual activity for millennia by the time these terms were devised, although moral and legal condemnation of such practices seems to have been

confined to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions in the ancient world. The belief that God created man in His own “image and likeness” confers upon men an inherent dignity and responsibility unknown to paganism, but awareness of this dignity and responsibility makes violations of human nature especially grievous offenses. Nevertheless, neither heathen polytheists nor any of the forms of monotheism stemming from Abraham acknowledged the existence of a “homosexual” class of men distinct from others. There was no term to identify “homosexuality” before recent times because there was no concept to which it corresponded.

This point is made firmly, if reluctantly, by K.J. Dover in the definitive work on its subject, *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), in which he asserts in the first footnote on page one that, despite the Greeks’ awareness of varying sexual preferences among men, “their language had no nouns corresponding to the English nouns ‘a homosexual’ and ‘a heterosexual,’ since they assumed...that (a) everyone responds at different times to both homosexual and to heterosexual stimuli, and (b) virtually no male both penetrates other males and submits to penetration by other males at the same stage of his life.” In fact, what was commonplace among the ancient Greeks is what we would properly call “pederasty” — that is, older, usually more powerful men taking their pleasure with younger men or pubescent boys. It was also widely practiced among the Romans and seems to have been pervasive in the ancient world.

There were, of course, numerous words — mostly mocking or obscene — dealing with such practices, but they all focused on particular actions; there was no term that encompassed those with a “same-sex orientation” as a group. Rather, in the ancient world, the pertinent distinction was between men who took the dominant, active role and those who assumed a passive role, analogous to women. Although then, as now, there were free men who felt a compulsion to assume the passive role, it was mostly the fate of slaves and others of desperately low status. Slaves might well have been the object of pity, but men who voluntarily submitted to other men were generally regarded with sarcastic contempt. A perusal of the satirical poetry of authors such as Catullus, Juvenal, Martial, and their like will quickly confirm this; and there is more detail regarding the erotic preoccupations of the ancient world in J.N. Adams’s definitive *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (1982) than most of us should care to know.

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The first-century B.C. Roman poet Catullus provides a striking example of the brutality of unbridled lust in the Rome of his day, a condition to which we seem to be returning in ours. In the 16th poem in his collection, Catullus threatens, with what nowadays we would call sexual assault, two acquaintances who have accused the poet, on the basis of his “voluptuous verses” (*versiculis... molliculi*), of being not only “too little modest” (*parum pudicum*) but “not enough of a man” (*male...marem*).

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A more accurate translation would have used coarser terms, but that seems unnecessary to convey the point. Catullus, or at least the persona he created for his poetry, angry at the imputation of effeminacy, menaces his accusers with the prospect of his treating them as women — or as boys used for erotic gratification.

Note that Catullus would not consider himself “homosexual” or “gay,” but he displays an “orientation” toward his own sex insofar as he is willing to take pleasure in the bodies of other men and boys. In poem 48 he celebrates the innumerable kisses he has enjoyed with the boy Juventius, just as he does in poems 5 and 7 with his female mistress, Lesbia (the name is generally taken as a code for a real Roman woman, Clodia, and has nothing to do with “lesbian” in the contemporary sense). There are at least seven poems in his collection devoted to the poet’s desire for Juventius, and several of them involve his rivalry with his nemeses, Aurelius and Furius, for the boy’s favors. To be sure, the Romans were not unaware of the unsavory aspect of assuming an overly aggressive masculine role; Catullus refers to an overbearing military commander as an *irrumator* in much the same way modern men use “bastard” to indicate a man who treats others unfeelingly or disdainfully.

In the ancient world, then, a man was designated by a particularly opprobrious term — *cinaedus*, say, or *pathicus*

— because he behaved in a particular way. In the contemporary world, terms like “gay” and “homosexual” imply that a man behaves in a particular way because he is, inherently, a particular kind of man with a particular sexual “orientation.” Even in modern times, the ancient way of seeing the matter may still be found among those who are untutored in the sophistications of the American Psychological Association.

{section removed from original article <https://www.newoxfordreview.org/documents/homosexuality-as-a-philological-problem/#>.}

Although at that time I had no religion and hadn't even thought about Catholicism, I regarded the man as an exploitative brute — an irrumator in both senses of the term! — but I didn't think of him as “gay” or “homosexual” any more than he did.

Hence the difficulty with the term “homosexual” and its various substitutes: It does not reflect reality and, therefore, results in moral confusion. The diction of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is, therefore, problematic in condemning “homosexual acts” (actus homosexualitatis; no. 2357). Catholic authors prior to the mid-20th century discussed “sodomy” or “unnatural vice,” not homosexuality. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, provides a taxonomy of sins against our sexual nature, under the category of lust, beginning with simple fornication and descending all the way to bestiality. Just a grade less opprobrious is sodomy, “where use of the right

sex is not observed” (Summa Theologiae, II-II: q154, a12, ad 4). It should, however, also be observed that sodomy between a man and a woman is also a “sin against nature” or an “unnatural vice” (vitia contra naturam). Since a man can do to a woman exactly what he does to another man in order to gratify his lust, it makes little sense to talk about “homosexual acts.”

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The damage done by the introduction of the dubious term “homosexual” has been compounded by debasement of the term “sex.” The term principally and literally signifies the distinction or division between male and female, which is required for sexual reproduction. In the course of the 20th century, however, “sex” has come to mean any activity or mental or emotional experience that provokes desire and leads to arousal and orgasm. “Gender,” a word that until well into the 20th century was a grammatical term designating whether substantives and qualifiers were masculine, feminine, or neuter, has become a substitute for “sex” as a way of distinguishing between men and women and, of course, the whole array of ersatz “genders” and “identities” that currently confuse our discourse. The gender of adjectives and pronouns depends on the gender of the nouns to which they pertain, but the gender of nouns is usually arbitrary: There is no intrinsic reason, for instance, why “foot” in Spanish (el pie) is masculine and “hand” (la mano) is feminine. The ideologues who have pushed through this change in our language have done so in order to insinuate that the

“sexuality” of men and women is every bit as random and arbitrary as the gender of nouns.

In surrendering to this linguistic Blitzkrieg, the Church has caused herself myriad problems. Acceptance of the term “homosexual,” for example, has permitted dissenters from Catholic moral theology, such as Fr. James Martin, S.J., to suggest that condemnation of “homosexual acts” is tantamount to condemnation of “homosexuals” as a distinct kind of human being. But, in fact, the Church’s condemnation of sodomy and other sins against human nature does not single out a definable group of men for simply “being who they are.” Innumerable sinners — from Catullus to the site foreman on my construction job, none of whom “identifies as gay” — are equally guilty according to the Church’s teaching. If there were certainly such a creature as a “homosexual,” it would not be sinful to be one: Being subject to temptation is the lot of every man and woman, and most of us — at least during some periods in our lives — endure agonizing struggles with erotic temptations. It is not the temptation per se but succumbing to it that constitutes the sin.

The moral confusion engendered by misleading terms like “homosexuality” may have sunk to its nadir in the summer of 2016 in the wake of the mass shooting at Pulse, a “gay” nightclub in Orlando, Florida, by a Muslim fanatic. The (now retired) bishop of St. Petersburg, Robert Lynch, in a handwringing blog post, found complicit in the massacre “religion, including our own, which targets, mostly verbally, and also often breeds contempt for gays, lesbians and transgender people.” These “attacks,” he

wrote, “often plant the seed of contempt, then hatred, which can ultimately lead to violence.” It would be risible to imply that an Islamist was moved to murder men and women he identified as sexual perverts by the severity of Catholic moral teaching, even if the Church were frequently and robustly presenting this teaching; but this has not been the case for decades.

To be sure, I cannot say that I have never heard mention of “homosexuals” or “gays” during the Mass. When I lived in the Diocese of Raleigh, I briefly attended a parish where the pastor had two homiletic themes: the wickedness of U.S. support for the Nicaraguan Contras (with the corollary theme that the Sandinistas were forces of justice and enlightenment) and the shameful fashion in which Americans, including Catholics, treated “homosexuals.” This was in the 1980s. Late in 1998, after the murder of Matthew Shepard, a student at the University of Wyoming, in an attack widely regarded as an anti-gay hate crime, the parochial vicar at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh compared Shepard, bound to a fence and left to die by his assailants, to Christ on the Cross. These instances hardly suggest a severe condemnation of the “gay community.”

“But surely,” you might ask, “you have heard some priest explain the Church’s teaching on ‘homosexual acts’ in a homily or a letter in the bulletin or in adult catechesis?” A worthwhile question, but the answer requires some background. My wife and I were received into the Church on Holy Saturday in 1974. I am sure that the number of times I have missed Sunday Mass or a day

of obligation due to illness or some other cause during the subsequent 45 years can be counted on my fingers, perhaps the fingers of one hand. I have also been to numerous daily Masses, and I have attended Mass in many dioceses in both the United States and Europe. During these 45 years, I have heard the Church's teaching against sodomy mentioned not once. Not a single time. Never. After all, who would wish to be unkind to "homosexuals" or "gays," or any of the other rapidly multiplying varieties of pseudo-sexual self-identification?

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By acquiescing in the term "homosexual," the Church has permitted a group of men and women to define themselves in contradiction to the traditional Christian conception of human nature — indeed, to the only rational understanding of humanity, as attested by classical philosophy as well. Without a clear, firm idea of human nature, there is no basis at all for morality, as morals are essentially a guide for the proper functioning of the kind of creature man is. The predictable result of the abandonment of a rational understanding of nature is the constantly expanding profusion of "gender identities," the adherents of which all clamor for the "right" continually to redefine reality according to their immediate desires. Having divested themselves of the intellectual tools to argue for Christian teaching, nonplussed clergymen have for decades tacitly agreed not to discuss the matter — much as they have done regarding divorce and "remarriage" and contraception. Now there seems to be a movement afoot at the highest levels of the Church to

dilute Christian teaching about sex, if not demolish it altogether.

Equivocation about sexual morality is no favor to any of us sinners, and it is anything but merciful to those who are especially tempted to twist their sexual nature in pursuit of erotic fantasies, the origin of which is surely demonic. So, ironically, I agree with Bishop Lynch: **We do owe an apology to the LGBTQ “community” — not because we have “targeted” them but because we have neglected to catechize them, to remind them in season and out that eternal salvation, as well as a fulfilling human life, depends on their living in accordance with their created nature and the commands of God.**

“Mere description is impossible. Language forces you in to an implicit comment.” — C.S. Lewis

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