

Preface: Addio Ragazzo di Luce

**Farewell speeches and homilies by Father van Kilsdonk s.j. to homosexual victims of AIDS
Armando Editore, Roma 2016**

This book presents thirty- one sermons by father Jan van Kilsdonk s.j. (1917-2008) who worked most of his life in Amsterdam where he also died and was buried. These sermons were pronounced solemnly and eloquently during funeral ceremonies of young men who died in the last decades of the previous century because of aids, untreatable at that time. The sermons were based on his deep understanding of and compassion with the sufferings of aids victims thanks to his close and unconditional commitment during their final stage of life. In fact he cared for more than two hundred of these victims living in Amsterdam; all of them homosexuals. He explicitly rejected any causal connection that was often made at the eve of the new century between contracting aids and sexual orientation . These sermons address many issues: to the circumstances under which these young men lived, their family relations, their hopes and sorrows, debates on same-sex relations, the position of the official Roman Catholic Church or Muslim and Jewish traditions in these debates, the deep suffering and how to preserve human dignity as long as possible. During the funeral he showered praise on these men and blessed them solemnly as princes of earth and sons of God. The Introduction by Pierre Valkering subtly and precisely explains all these aspects coherently, the immense work for giving support and consolation by father van Kilsdonk, day and night, and how to understand this in a broader and, more specifically, in a social-philosophical and theological context of the Old and New Testament. For two organisations, which have collaborated with each other for years, this book, published in The Netherlands by Valkhof Pers in 2012, is highly relevant because of a related issue, namely the theory and practices of ‘social quality’. These organisations are Eurispes in Rome (l’Istituto di Ricerca degli Italiani) and the IASQ in Amsterdam (International Association of universities on Social Quality in Europe, Asia, Australia and soon in North and south America) . Both took the initiative to publish the book in the Italian language in order to present it to the Vatican on behalf of the synod on family affairs and sexuality in the Autumn of 2014. The Pope recently invited people from different authorities than the Church to present their experiences, suppositions, and ideas from the perspective of daily circumstances, their beliefs and their hopes. And this book delivers an impressive overview of these experiences and related feelings in Amsterdam on the eve of the new century. Secondly, both organisations conclude that father van Kilsdonk implicitly discussed an essential aspect of ‘social quality thinking’ concerning daily circumstances of people as developed the past decades in different continents. People are in essence ‘social beings’ and not ‘atoms’ of large aggregates (also paradoxically called “societies” in the second approach) striving for profit and preventing losses. Father van Kilsdonk explained that the first approach – to appreciate people as real social beings - refers to the legend of Aeneas and the second approach to the legend of Oedipus.¹ People constitute again and again ‘the social’ and its quality and also disquality, undermining human dignity, equal value and solidarity.² An essential aspect of this ‘social quality thinking’ concerns different conditions for human dignity and solidarity, namely the enhancement of people’s social recognition, social responsibility and respect. Exactly these conditions play a key role in the sermons. They clearly express their meaning in modern circumstances with its egocentric and hedonistic orientation. Both – the ideas behind these

¹ J. van Kilsdonk s.j (1987)., ‘Preface’, in: A. van Heusden and E-M van den Eerenbeemt, ‘*Balance in Motion, Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and his vision of Individual and Family Therapy*’, New York: Brunner/Mazel.

² L.J.G. van der Maesen, A.C. Walker (eds) (2012), ‘*Social Quality: From theory to Indicators*’, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

sermons and social quality thinking – have a lot of affinity with the ideas and practices of San Francesco as a profound comment on forms of hedonism in his age, centuries ago. One of the sermons referred explicitly to Francesco: he was an example for father Van Kilsdonk's own lifestyle in Amsterdam as well. During his final fifteen years, father Van Kilsdonk was supported and cared by the 'Fraternity of the Seventh Heaven', composed by his friends.³ It organised three crowded festal parties around father van Kilsdonk. During one of them they declared him solemnly in the presence of 4000 people to be the 'Priest of Amsterdam'. This Fraternity welcomed the initiative to publish the book by Eurispes. The Dutch publisher Valkhof Pers was so kind to prepare the Italian publication by granting all the rights. The fraternity contacted his family, friends, colleagues, and supporters in order to finance the translation. In a very short time the finances could be collected. All of them are strongly dedicated to the work done by father van Kilsdonk and are convinced his ideas, expressed in the sermons, are highly important and should be brought to the international floor in debates on family relations, sex relations, birth-control and many herewith related themes – for example the position of women – a new inspiration and to liberate these issues from fundamentalism and narrow mindedness. .

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