**Courage Ministry**

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**Archbishop Charles Chaput’s concerns**

**[A quarterly article now replacing the bimonthly article.]**

**Introduction**

Archbishop Charles Chaput, O. F.M. Cap. has written a column from his website entitled “CatholicPhilly in September 2019, which we as Courage members and supporters ought to ponder. He considers that Father James Martin’s statements and activities are ambiguous regarding same-sex related (LGBT) issues. I consider the Archbishop’s concerns would help us to appreciate the Church’s teaching, so I quote his September message below.

**Concern One**

Father Martin suggests that same-sex attracted people and those with gender dysphoria should be labelled according to their attraction and dysphoria, calling for the use of the phrase “LGBT Catholic” in Church documents and language. But while the Church does teach that the body is integral to human identity, our sexual appetites do not define who we are. If we are primarily defined by our sexual attractions, then, in order to be fulfilled, it would follow that we must identify with and act on our attractions. Any thing calling for the denial or restraint of our sexual appetites would logically amount to repression and cruelty. This is opposite of the Gospel’s clear teaching that our identity is found in Jesus Christ, created in the image and likeness of God and called to be sons and daughter of God.

**Concern Two**

Father Martin has, in the past, suggested that people are born ‘gay.” In his own words, “It is a fact that people are born this way…[a] psychological, psychiatric, and biological truth.” To his credit, Father Martin has seemed to modify this view; studies have recently shown that there is no “gay gene,” and homosexuality is the product of a variety of factors.

It is true that many persons with same-sex attraction have experienced it for as long as they can remember, but not firm scientific consensus exists on the cause. Moreover, genetic dispositions – to the degree they do exist - say nothing about the benefit or harm toward which they dispose those having them. Any implication that a person’s behaviour is predetermined and that intellect and free will have little role in the formation and control of his or her sexual appetites, is both false and destructive, especially to young people.

**Concern Three**

Father Martin suggests that Catholic teaching on same-sex attraction as “objectively disordered” (for example, in CCC 2358) is cruel and should be modified. (*CCC is the Catholic Church Catechism*) is cruel and should be modified. In his words, “saying that one of the deepest part of a person – the part that gives and receives love – is disordered is needlessly hurtful.) But here Father Martin misrepresents Catholic belief. As the U.S. Bishops stressed in their 2006 document, *Ministry to Persons* *with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care:*

“It is crucially important to understand that saying a person has a particular inclination that is disordered is not to say that the person as a whole is disordered. Nor does it mean that one has been rejected by God or the Church. Sometimes the Church is misinterpreted or misrepresented as teaching that persons with homosexual inclinations are objectively disordered, as if everything about them were disordered or rendered morally defective by this inclination. Rather, the disorder is in that particular inclination, which is not ordered toward the fulfillment of the natural ends of human sexuality. Because of this, acting in accord with such an inclination simply cannot contribute to the true good of the human person. Nevertheless, while the particular inclination to homosexual acts is disordered, the person retains his or her intrinsic human dignity and value.”

It’s worth recalling here that the *Catechism* also describes lust, extra-marital relations, and contracepted sex (2351), masturbation (2352), and even non-sexual sins such as lying and calumny (1753), as intrinsically “disordered.” The suggestion that the wisdom of the Church, rooted in the Word of God and centuries of human experience, is somehow cruel or misguided does grave harm to her mission. Families have been destroyed because of this misperception, and Father Martin regularly contributes ambiguity to issues that demand a liberating biblical clarity.

**Concern Four**

Father Martin partners with organizations like New Ways Ministry that oppose or ignore the teaching of the Church, and he endorses events, such as PRIDE month, that cause confusion for the faithful. To the contrary we need to reaffirm, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) stated in its 1986 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons ,*that

“All support should be withdrawn from any organization which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which is are ambiguous about it, or which neglect it entirely. Such support, or even the semblance of such support, can be gravely misinterpreted.”

**Concern Five**

Father Martin – no doubt – unintentionally - inspires hope that the Church’s teachings on human sexuality can be changed. In his book, *Building A Bridge*, he writes: “For a teaching to be really authoritative it is expected that it will be received by the people of God…From what I can tell, in the LGBT community, the teaching that LGBT people must be celibate their entire lives…has not been received.” One might easily, and falsely, infer from such language that the Church’s teaching on sexual intimacy lacks binding authority for same-sex attracted Catholics.

Again to his credit, Father Martin has stressed that, “as a Catholic priest, I have never challenged [the Church’s] teachings, nor will I .” But what is implied or omitted often speaks as loudly as what is actually stated, and in the current climate, incomplete truths do, in fact, present a challenge to Catholic belief.

When people hear that the “Church welcomes gay people” or needs to be more “inclusive and welcoming” without also hearing the conditions of an authentically Christian life se for *all* persons by Jesus Christ and his Church – namely, living a life of chastity – they can easily misunderstand the nature of Christian conversion and discipleship.

For this reason, Catholic teaching always requires more than polite affirmation or *pro forma* agreement, particularly from those who comment publicly on matters of doctrine. Faithful Catholics who are same-sex attracted need support and encouragement in the virtue of chastity. They deserve to hear – as all people do – the truth about human sexuality spoken clearly and confidently. Anything less lacks both mercy and justice.

In its 1986 *Letter,* the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith warned us,

“This Congregation wishes to ask the Bishops to be especially cautious of any programs which may seek to pressure the Church to change her teaching, even while claiming not to do. A careful examination of their public statements and the activities they promote reveals a studied ambiguity by which they attempt to mislead the pastors and the faithful.”

Supporters of Father Martin’s efforts will note, correctly, that several Church leaders have endorsed his work. Those Churchmen are responsible for their words - as I am of mine, as pastor of the Church in Philadelphia. And specifically in that role as pastor, I want to extend the CDF’s caution to all the faithful of the Church in Philadelphia, regarding the ambiguity about the same-sex related issues found throughout the statements and activities of Father James Martin.

**Conclusion**

In 2006 I wrote a Master of Theology thesis analysing the 1986 document of the Congregation of the Faith entitled: *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care.* In my thesis I devoted a chapter to the question of the gay gene and a further chapter on the New Ways ministry. My conclusions in the thesis support the teaching of Archbishop Charles Chaput. If you want a copy of my thesis email at the Brisbane Courage address given below.

I conclude with the clarity that Brisbane Courage declares in its bookmark of September 2019. The bookmark was printed for the Ignite Conferences in Brisbane and in Sydney in September and October 2019.

*We believe that the dignity and identity of a person is not determined by their sexual orientation, but by their relationship with God. We help people live this relationship by developing trust, compassion and friendship.*

Brisbane Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

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