

Courage Ministry
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“Is the Catholic Church Homophobic when it comes to same-sex marriage?”

Introduction: The topic for this month’s article was debated at a seminar held on the night of Tuesday 12th March at Emmaus House by the *Blind Eye Ministries*, (a ministry of the Emmanuel Community Brisbane to the homeless.)

I was one of three presenters and acknowledge that what I presented was of mediocre standard for various reasons. This article will comment in a deeper way what the Catholic Church holds and teaches about homosexuality.

All men and women are a reflection of God’s goodness

In the book of Genesis we see God’s plan for creation. He makes man and woman, male and female, who are fashioned in God’s own image and likeness. “Human beings are nothing less than the work of God Himself; and in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator. They do this in a striking way in their cooperation with Him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other.” (John Harvey: *The Homosexual Person*, p.237)

The covenant of Marriage

Marriage is a covenant. The Church builds on this foundation through the institution of the sacrament of marriage. Consequently, the divine plan of the loving and life giving union of men and women is celebrated as each *donates* him or herself in a complementary union to the other in an uninhibited, exciting, erotic response. “...God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Saviour of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians....Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. This love is an eminently human one...it involves the good of the whole person... Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of this sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. God Himself is the author of matrimony.” (Nos 48-49 *Gaudium et Spes*).

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: Deus Caritas Est

A very important statement occurs in this encyclical about seeking the good of the other. “...the most profound promise of the *eros* can only mature when we do not seek a passing and sudden happiness. On the contrary, together we find the patience to discover the other increasingly in the depth of his person, in the totality of body and soul so that finally the happiness of the other becomes more important than my own. Then, one no longer wishes to receive something, but to give oneself, and in liberation of one’s “I” man finds himself and is filled with joy.” (Note 17)

The irrevocable personal consent

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in note 2364 comments about the married couple forming “the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator and governed by his laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent. ... They are no longer two; from now on they form one flesh. The covenant they freely contracted imposes on the spouses the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble. ‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’” The beautiful comment by St John Chrysostom says it all for me and for the Christian married state:

“...young husbands should say to their wives: I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us....I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.”

If we keep in mind what both pope emeritus Benedict XVI and St John Chrysostom have written we come to the inevitable conclusion that those with same sex attraction cannot say that “I prefer you to my life itself.” It is impossible in same sex attraction genital action to be complementary and to give oneself – it is a part giving of self. The same sex-attracted man or woman does not orient his or her life toward another who is different from himself or herself. Rather he or she orients himself or herself toward one who is like himself or herself. It is pure selfism, even if given in good faith – it is not a donation to the other of the complete self as God has intended.

On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (CDF 1986): Article 16

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in its 1986 document about homosexual persons, supports the dignity of all persons and shows a compassionate pastoral response. The document states why genital homosexual activity is immoral yet calls for respect for each person and deplores violent malice in speech or action against homosexual persons. It calls on the Church’s pastors to condemn such action whenever it occurs. The document urges homosexual persons to “enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord’s cross...To refuse to sacrifice one’s own will in obedience to the will of the Lord is effectively to prevent salvation. ...Christians who are homosexual are called, **as all of us are**, to a chaste life.”

In my work as a Courage member I consider article 16 as crucial for my ministry and keeps me focused on the mercy and compassion required. I will quote part of it. “... The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Every one living on the face of the earth, has personal problems and difficulties, but challenges to growth, strengths, talents and gifts as well. ...**the Church...refuses to consider the person as a ‘heterosexual’ or a ‘homosexual’ and insists that every person has a fundamental identity:** the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.”

The Hierarchical Church's response

If we reduce persons to a label we are depersonalizing them. The document requests the “bishops to support, with the means at their disposal, the development of appropriate forms of pastoral care for homosexual persons. These would include the assistance of the psychological, sociological and medical sciences, in full accord with the teaching of the Church.” The Bishops of Australia have taken seriously this document. I have been encouraged by my contact in the past fifteen years with five Archbishops and a number of diocesan and auxiliary bishops about the work of Courage in Australia. There has been financial and pastoral help. The hierarchy cares about all its children. A French churchman, Cardinal Barbarin of Lyon asserted that “I and many other priests are engaged in dialogue with a number of homosexual people. They know they are loved and that that they will always be welcome. I would remind them however that God watches over and says to everyone: *You are precious in my eyes.* I hope that everyone listens to Christ's call and are helped to reciprocate.” The same Cardinal in an Ad Limina visit to the Holy See in November 2012 stated “I can understand that legislators want to give right to members of society who are suffering injustices and discrimination. But I do not see how it can claim the right to change the meaning of words.”

Conclusion: A principle for me:

“Whenever a judgement is required on the Christian morality of any action the immediate questions to be asked are how far this practice is compatible with the biblical vision of the human being and to what extent it is inspired by the example of Jesus.” (Note 103 in Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Bible and Morality – Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*).

My personal stance is that I am not homophobic when I challenge the gay lobby and proponents of conduct not in conformity with Jesus and the Bible. We need love and truth; either one without the other is flawed. We need the help of the Spirit in dialoguing and meeting with those not for us.

In the past fifteen years I have admired the heroism and fortitude of at least fifty same sex attracted persons, comprising single men and women, married men, married women and priests who have sought my assistance.

My basic mantra is that we all ought to live our lives according to the calling and mind of God. (Ephesians 4:1-3). We ought to practice discipline and renew our mind as by a spiritual revolution (Romans 12.2). We need to know that according to Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church there is just one way in which we exercise our sexual functions - and that is in holy matrimony. All of us must conform our own will in obedience to the will of the Lord for our own happiness, and our own salvation. (CDF document of 1986).

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