

Courage Ministry

Article 73 February 2013

Brendan Scarce

Part two of Van den Aardweg's: *On the Psychogenesis of Homosexuality*

Introduction

Part two of *On the Psychogenesis of Homosexuality* complements what I wrote about Van den Aardweg's views in Courage article 72 – December 2012. He vigorously argues that the 'gay' lifestyle is 'a neurotic and emotionally, morally (and medically) degrading lifestyle.' I had a reservation about the term neurotic, because it seemed too strong and labelling. The Macquarie Dictionary says neurosis is 'an emotional disorder in which feelings of anxiety, obsessional thoughts, compulsive acts, and physical complaints without objective evidence of disease, in various patterns, dominate the personality.'

Certainly some of the men I have seen have been involved in compulsive acts and gone back to their sexual haunts because of extreme loneliness and isolation. And some have reported obscene sexual behaviour. Most have had worrying, if not obsessional thoughts, and anxiety is a condition for most.

The weakening and lessening of same-sex attraction

While many people say that change from a same-sex attraction to one of opposite attraction is impossible, Van den Aardweg believes that this is 'a wrong representation of the dilemma' and says that the culture at large is anti-change and 'its propaganda is strong in the mental and medical health professions.' [Recently a mother of a grade 11 boy, who declared that he was same sex attracted, informed me about this belief in the psychologist her son was visiting.] Nonetheless, Van den Aardweg asserts that: 'Sincere and sensible resisting, though, always brings at least some improvement with regard to one's sexual attraction and in the overall mental condition.' This is true for the persons I have been involved with as a Courage counsellor and in those who have been accountable in their lifestyle by adopting the Courage plan and way of life.

Van den Aardweg says further that:- 'The person who becomes less immature/ self centred will experience a proportional decrease in same-sex attractions and increase in mature manhood/womanhood.' I have seen this in the men and the woman in my experience who have developed a deep and constant prayer life. I have been greatly edified by the amount of prayer undertaken by those I know. Also three of the men have been more involved with the opposite sex and are seeking marriage. To my knowledge none of these have lapsed into same sex acting out. Indeed they have displayed a healthier masculine interest and emotional attitude toward the opposite sex.

The limited success of therapy for same sex attracted men and women

Van den Aardweg cites the following reasons for the limited success of therapy.

- 1). There is a lack of resolution to change.
- 2). There is a weakness of will – in spite of good intentions.

3). There is the hardship of beating deep seated emotional and behavioural patterns. However by undergoing the discipline of toughening up, a person can improve one's life and one's moral stance that will lead to a change in the intensity of same sex attraction. In order to do this Van den Aardweg spells out a programme that includes the person getting to know him or herself psychologically and even more deeply at a moral level. This would include making an inventory akin to the AA list of recognizing and acknowledging 'moral weaknesses, vices, self seeking and lack of love, lust enslavement, pride, insincerity, disproportionate self-love, lack of self-discipline, cowardice, discontentedness, revolt and ingratitude'. Thus a person engages in a battle to grow in the virtues while fighting the vices. As stated above it requires a toughening up of the person.

Van den Aardweg's wholistic approach in dealing with same sex attraction

'In this endeavour, the moral, spiritual and religious dimensions of the psyche must be involved and activated: the soul's inherent need for God, its moral conscience and unconscious longing for moral purity, the healing power of prayer, forgiving and asking for forgiveness, and doing penance.' The whole person is addressed and 'this holistic approach is the most civilized and humane... It avoids on one side the errors of a shallow humanist-materialist view of man... On the other side, this approach is at variance with the primitive mentality, which reacts with merciless harshness toward those who may feel or act upon same-sex attraction.'

It is incumbent on all of us to always act with mercy and compassion and speak in a way that is loving and not condemnatory. Some may take exception to our holding 'a truth', but we can insist on it as Paul says to Timothy: *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction.* (2.Tim. 4:2.). I notice that when I speak what I consider the truth and not exaggerate or jazz it up, I feel quite liberated and free. An interesting emotion in the very charged world of Gay activism.

With the sort of psychological behaviour and background Van den Aardweg has outlined can a same-sex attracted person have any hope of modifying and resisting the lure of acting out and experience a lessening of the same sex attraction drive? Yes, I say!

The witness, record and experience of the possibilities of change

In my role as Courage Director, since 1998 I have seen at least 50 men and women about same sex attraction. Twenty Five single men aged from 19 to 60+, Four single females, in ages ranging from mid 20's to 50+. Six married men – ages ranging from late 30's to 60+. Four divorced men, in their early 40's to 60's+. Ten parents, which included married couples seeking advice and wisdom about their children, whose ages ranged from 16 years to 38 years. One couple where husband and wife separated after 20 plus years of marriage and the husband went off with a male. Three priests were part of the 25 male cohort, while none of these has claimed to be sexually active.

The record

All but two of the men who presented themselves wanted to lead a life of chastity. The majority of the men were prepared to adopt the five goals of Courage. A number had a lapse during their gradual growth and strengthening in the Courage way of life.

The preeminent factor that made for continual growth in virtue was regular prayer and a developing degree of accountability. About four of the males reported that they had been sexually abused as minors, by people either in charge of them or caring for them in some way, eg., scout leader, lay man as altar server trainer, boarding school staff member, or on a social outing by a priest. Nearly all reported a lessening of the feelings of same sex attraction.

Certain common factors in those I see

Other significant factors for these men and women was frequent use of pornographic material, for one man it was almost compulsive and obsessive behaviour. One male went to public toilets on an impulse to have a quick sexual involvement with an anonymous person. One was addicted to heroin, and was receiving psychiatric treatment and using methadone to wean himself off his addiction. Most have shared with me periods in their life of a terrible and severe loneliness. For one or two, utter isolation is the major reality. I think this lack of brotherhood and a healthy male friend is a precursor in the development of depression, anxiety, sadness, anger, rage and hopelessness.

Some parents report that they are broken-hearted because there won't be grandchildren and some worry about the eternal salvation of their son or daughter. In some families there is a serious breach and deep division occurs, often because of the demands of the same sex attracted person.

The men and women who have come to me for help have wanted to be faithful to the Church's teaching and mores. Perhaps this is why for the vast majority I do not believe they have a neurosis. There may be small elements of neurosis in their thinking and behaviour. This is my only proviso about Van den Aardweg's viewpoint. His analysis is in my opinion profoundly correct. I have a great respect for his scholarship and the wisdom he has gained in the experience of counselling the same sex attracted for forty years.

Conclusion

In view of the summary of the fifty persons – does the claim by Van den Aardweg hold water about the neurotic, emotional and anxious nature of same sex attracted? It does in part only, since the cohorts have different purposes. His group seek remittance of their same-sex attraction. My group does not seek the change of same sex attraction as a primary aim, but to live a holy way of life and so are dealing with those issues of self-aggrandisement mentioned above. The younger men have not fallen prey to neurosis or that lifestyle. Hence I can ultimately subscribe to Van den Aardweg's argument that a certain amount of change is possible.

Brisbanecourage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane
Contact PO Box 151 Geebung Qld 4034 Ph. (07) 3865 2464
Email Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com

