

**Towards Dignity and Truth:
Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality
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The topic of homosexuality is not an easy one to discuss. We may know people who are good people in many ways who also experience a homosexual inclination. Conversations on homosexuality can lead to discussions of tolerance¹ of others' beliefs and relativism. Relativism says there is no universal truth so one can believe and do whatever one wants as long as no one is hurt.

When the Catholic Church teaches that homosexual *acts* are sin, those who embrace relativism and tolerance say the Church is promoting "hate speech." *It is never our intent* to promote "hate". It is our intent to offer Truth. Yes, there is truth, Truth that comes from God. People have free will to make their own choices. To be truly "free" to make their own choice, they need to hear what God says for, as Jesus says, "*The truth will set you free*" (John 8:33b).

Another challenge in discussing homosexuality comes from confusion over some statements made by Pope Francis on homosexuality. Does he or does he not support same-sex unions? Here, for clarity, I offer what Pope Francis wrote in *Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love*

In discussing the dignity and mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, 'as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family.'²

More recently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a statement explaining why the Church cannot bless same-sex relationships (more on this later).³

It is important for us to know the Truth that comes from God. It is also important for us to know how to offer compassion and pastoral care to individuals experiencing same-sex attraction for, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a

¹ See my article, "Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Dialogue." January 12, 2021.

<http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=5641>

² Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia of the Holy Father Francis to Bishops, Priests, and Deacons Consecrated Persons Christian Married Couple and All the Lay Faithful on Love in the Family*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2016. 251.

³ Catholic News Agency, March 15, 2021 "Full Text: Vatican doctrinal office's response to a question on the blessing of same-sex unions" <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-vaticans-doctrinal-office-response-and-note-on-the-blessing-of-same-sex-unions>.

trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”⁴

Considering what I have written thus far, I now feel led by the Spirit to offer the following to help us understand what our Catholic Church teaches about homosexuality and how we offer this teaching with love and compassion. Remember, we are called to hate the sin, but love the sinner.

What is Homosexuality?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins its discussion of homosexuality with the following:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.⁵

Later in this article, I will present the scriptural origins of our Church’s teaching on homosexuality as well as how it is “contrary to the natural law.” Before that, I want to help us understand what the Church means when it uses the word “disorder” in describing homosexual acts. First and foremost, it is absolutely essential to understand that the Church is *not* saying the whole person is disordered. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) explicitly says

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.⁶

Christopher West says

This is why it is a terrible injustice to define ourselves based on how we experience sexual desires.⁷

We need to look at the *whole* person. If a person defines their entire identity by one aspect of their life, such as homosexual inclinations, then they may make themselves a slave to it.⁸

It is important to note that the Church is only referring to the homosexual inclination itself, *not the person*, as “disordered” as it goes against nature and God’s plan for human sexual acts to be between males and females whose bodies complement one another.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2357.

⁶ USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*. 6.

⁷ West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, 144.

⁸ Cf. USCCB, *Guidelines*, 22.

It is also very important to understand how the Church's teaching distinguishes between homosexual inclination and homosexual acts.

While the Church teaches that homosexual acts are immoral, she does distinguish between engaging in homosexual acts and a having a homosexual inclination. While the former is always objectively sinful, the latter is not. To the extent that a homosexual tendency or inclination is not subject to one's free will, one is not morally culpable for that tendency.⁹

One is only culpable for what one chooses. One does not choose to have the homosexual inclination. However, one does make a choice whether or not to engage in homosexual acts. With this in mind

The Church teaches that persons with a homosexual inclination "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity."¹⁰

It is also very important to understand, living in a hyper-sexed world, that looking at a person of the same-sex and finding them attractive or sexually enticing does not make one homosexual or bisexual. Just as we can look at a person of the opposite sex and see their beauty without pursuing sexual activity with them, we can appreciate the beauty of someone of the same sex without being a homosexual.¹¹ Yes, we are called to love. West reminds us

Unfortunately, the English language doesn't distinguish between different kinds of love.¹²

We also need to understand that avoiding acts of homosexuality is just one way we, as humans, struggle to live chaste lives.

The way of perfection passes by the way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle."¹³

Previously, I mentioned the influence of relativism in our society. We must also consider the perspective of "hedonism", which makes "pleasure" the guiding principle of our choices. In its 2006 document, "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: *Guidelines for Pastoral Care*", the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) writes

Viewed from this perspective, sexual relations are seen as simply another form of pleasure. Promiscuity is regarded as not only acceptable but normal. The virtue of chastity becomes incomprehensible. It can even appear to be an unhealthy and unnatural denial of pleasure."¹⁴

⁹ USCCB, *Guidelines*, 5.

¹⁰ USCCB, *Guidelines*, 2.

¹¹ Bohr, *Revised Catholic Moral Tradition*, 262.

¹² West, *Good News*, 144.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2015.

¹⁴ USCCB, *Guidelines*, 15.

We are all called to chastity.¹⁵ We are called to see sexuality as ordered (meaning the way God intended) to love and marriage.

Of course, heterosexual persons not uncommonly have disordered sexual inclinations as well...For example, any tendency toward sexual pleasure that is not subordinated to the greater goods of love and marriage is disordered, in that it inclines a person towards a use of sexuality that does not accord with the divine plan for creation.”¹⁶

What homosexuality is not – a Complementary Union.

To choose someone of the same sex for one's sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator's sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent.”¹⁷

The Causes/Origins of Homosexuality

In attempting to understand homosexuality, one may naturally ask the question, what causes it (“cause” meant without any judgment to whether it is good or bad). Some say it may be related to the person being over or under-loved by a parent¹⁸. Others speak of biology and genetics. The CDF wrote in 1975

A distinction is drawn, and it seems with some reason, between homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes, and is transitory or at least not incurable; and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable. In regard to this second category of subjects, some people conclude that their tendency is so natural that it justifies in their case homosexual relations within a sincere communion of life and love analogous to marriage, in so far as such homosexuals feel incapable of enduring a solitary life.”¹⁹

Whatever causes one considers, “There is currently no scientific consensus on the cause of the homosexual inclination.”²⁰

Whatever the “cause” of the homosexuality inclination is, the morality of homosexual *acts* involves more than just science.

¹⁵ See my article, “Chastity and Sexuality”, March 5, 2021. <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=6022>

¹⁶ USCCB, Guidelines, 5-6.

¹⁷ CDF, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986 Letter), 7.

¹⁸ See Bohr, 265.

¹⁹ CDF, *Persona Humana* (PH), 8.

²⁰ USCCB, Guidelines, 7.

However, the Catholic moral viewpoint is founded on human reason illumined by faith and is consciously motivated by the desire to do the will of God our Father. The Church is thus in a position to learn from scientific discovery but also to transcend the horizons of science and to be confident that her more global vision does greater justice to the rich reality of the human person in his spiritual and physical dimensions, created by God and heir, by grace, to eternal life.”²¹

Why the Church Says Homosexual Acts are Sin – The Bible

Our Catholic Church does not act on its own in teaching that homosexual acts are sinful. We find it in God’s Word as revealed to us in the Bible. It begins with the Sixth Commandment, “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18). Some define “adultery” in the commandment narrowly, limiting it to a person who is married having sex with someone other than their spouse. Our Catholic Church includes all sexual behavior under the Sixth Commandment, dedicating seventy paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Church* (2331-2400) to sexuality and sexual acts.

While the Sixth Commandment itself does not specifically mention homosexuality, the Bible does several times. The Book of Leviticus explicitly speaks of homosexual acts as sin:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman (Leviticus 18:22).

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, they have committed an abomination; the two of them should be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13).

Even when we understand homosexual acts are sinful, we (I know I do) may find it troubling to hear that a person should be put to death. There are at least two points to consider here. First, in those days, there were not prisons, at least as we have them today. The death penalty was “common” for the safety of others. Jesus changes our perspective on retaliation and loving our enemies in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48).

Secondly, there is a “death” that comes with sin but it is not physical death. It is mortal sin that breaks our relationship with God. In choosing to sin, we die to God. The good news is that God doesn’t want us to suffer the death of sin. Remember,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

God wants everyone to be saved. That’s why He gives us the Truth.

As early as Genesis 2:18, we see the natural order that God intended. God sets about making “*a helper suited*” to Adam. It is Eve, a woman, God creates to be a suitable partner to Adam. In Genesis 1:27-28, we hear,

²¹ CDF, 1986 Letter, 2.

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply.

God made males and females to complement one another in a way that two people of the same sex cannot.

We also find the topic of homosexuality in the New Testament.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Therefore, God handed them over to degrading passions. Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity (Romans 1:25-27).

When it says, “God handed them over to degrading passions,” it does not mean that God led them to homosexual acts as a degrading passion. Rather, in handing them over, God simply allowed them to make their own choices. I myself do not want to see anyone punished. My hope in writing this is that God is working through me to lead people from sin to inherit the kingdom of God.

Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, see also 1 Timothy 1:10).

In this list we see sodomites listed as one example of sexual sin among several. In biblical terms, “sodomites” is a term used to describe the homosexual sins of Sodom (see Genesis 19:4-11).

In its 1986 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons”, the CDF writes

An essential dimension of authentic pastoral care is the identification of causes of confusion regarding the Church's teaching. One is a new exegesis of Sacred Scripture which claims variously that Scripture has nothing to say on the subject of homosexuality, or that it somehow tacitly approves of it, or that all of its moral injunctions are so culture-bound that they are no longer applicable to contemporary life. These views are gravely erroneous and call for particular attention here.²²

Those who feel that “Scripture has nothing to say on the subject of homosexuality” would most likely say the reference to “sodomites” does not address homosexuality specifically but rather a broad range of sins committed by the people of Sodom. However, the two passages from Leviticus and Romans 1:25-27 are specific.

Still, we must not rush to condemn anyone for any sin, including homosexual acts. We leave the judging to God. However,

²² CDF, 1986 Letter, 4.

This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.²³

It is not our task to judge. We need to follow the response of Jesus when the woman caught in adultery is brought to him (John 8:1-11). She has been caught in the very act of adultery. There is no doubt that she did it. She could have been stoned for her sin. The scribes and Pharisees asked “*So what do you say?*” to which He responded, “*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*” (John 8:7b). They all leave without stoning her. Jesus says to the woman

Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “*No one, sir.*” Then Jesus said, “*Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more* (John 8:10b-11).

Jesus did not condemn. Neither should we. However, He did not condone the sin either. In fact, He explicitly told her, “*from now on do not sin any more.*”

Why the Church Says Homosexual Acts are Sin – Natural Law

In my blog article, “We Need to See as God Sees”, I spoke of our Catholic sacramental view of the world as follows:

As *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission* says, we face a “daily onslaught of false gospels, leading to confusion and distraction away from *invisible realities* to concerns solely of this world” (66, my emphasis). Fundamental to understanding the Catholic sacramental view of the world is understanding that the visible realities of the world in which we live as signs of the “invisible realities” of the eternal. As we profess in the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things *visible and invisible.*” The visible and invisible are not two different realities. They are one.²⁴

I continued

It is in this same sense of the visible revealing the invisible that our Catholic understanding of sexuality (see also *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*, 68) speaks of outward sexual acts revealing inward realities of the love between a man and a woman (see “[Chastity and Sexuality](#)”). The physical bodies of man and woman express how their love complements one another in a way that sexual acts between two men or two women cannot.

²³ CDF, PH, 8.

²⁴ Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunnicliff, “We Need to See as God Sees”. March 16, 2021. <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=6083>

This sacramental view of the world shows how our Catholic morality is not based on simply what the majority think or what those who hold worldly power (“positivism”) think. It is based on the way God created the world.²⁵

God created the world we live in. God established a divine order under which we are to operate. This divine order establishes what is right and wrong. Among the divine order that God established is the way the male and female bodies complement one another (see Genesis 1:27-28a). After creating male and female, God gave them dominion over what He had created.²⁶ Today, many take “dominion” to mean we are free to do whatever we want. In thinking this way, the moral fabric of our culture is torn. At best, morality would be based on “positivism”, meaning those who hold the power determine what is right and wrong. Thus, it can change as different people come to power.

However, having dominion does not give us absolute power. We have God’s moral code as given in the Bible. We can see some aspects of the divine order in “natural law”, the way our human nature works, the way male and female complement each other in a way two (or more) males or two (or more) females cannot. They cannot procreate. Thus, sexual acts between them lack the procreative element, which is fundamental to our understanding of sexual intimacy.

Indeed as soon as you sever orgasm from procreation, any (and every) means to genital pleasure becomes fair game. Deliberately sterilizing sexual intercourse effectively nullifies the natural and essential meaning of the sexual difference.²⁷

For sexual intimacy is far more than just two people engaging in physical sexual acts that are visible acts. The unity and procreative components of sexual acts represent the *invisible* component. We are created body (visible) and soul (invisible). West speaks of separating the two when he writes

Those who seek to justify homosexual acts are *ipso facto* guilty of Gnosticism, that ancient heresy that splits body and soul....The biological is person. It’s *the body* that shows us who we are and defines our call to sexual love.²⁸

The moral code prescribed by God is presented to us in the Bible. It is also seen in the natural order of things. Through natural law and faith, we open ourselves to something more

In moral matters man cannot make value judgments according to his personal whim: "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose on himself, but which holds him to obedience. . . . For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged."²⁹

The visible, including physical sexual acts are important. In fact,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Genesis 1:28b.

²⁷ West, *Good News*, 139.

²⁸ West, *Good News*, 145.

²⁹ PH, 3, interior quote from *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.

According to contemporary scientific research, the human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors which give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it.³⁰

The visible is not the whole of who we are. We need to understand the invisible behind the visible. Only then can we truly understand the relationship between our acts and what they represent.

Freedom & Culpability

We do indeed have free will. Our true freedom can be impeded by our lack of understanding. It can also be diminished by force from another person or entity. This is true of any type of behavior. The CDF speaks of it in the context of homosexual acts when it says

It has been argued that the homosexual orientation in certain cases is not the result of deliberate choice; and so the homosexual person would then have no choice but to behave in a homosexual fashion. Lacking freedom, such a person, even if engaged in homosexual activity, would not be culpable. Here, the Church's wise moral tradition is necessary since it warns against generalizations in judging individual cases. In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance; or other circumstances may increase it. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behaviour of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable.³¹

We Do Not Seek to Hate, We Seek to Love

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned the term “hate speech”. There are those who accuse the Catholic Church of hate speech when we say that homosexual acts are wrong. It is never our intent to promote hate. In fact, our faith calls us to speak the truth out of love. If we truly love a person, then we want what is best for them. What is best is eternal life. To attain eternal life, one needs to know the Truth that comes from God.

Why then is the Catholic Church misunderstood? At least part of the answer lies in how the word “disorder” is used. When the Catholic Church uses the word “disorder”, it means something that is not in accord with nature. As I said above, the Catholic Church does not mean in any way that the *whole* person is bad. In fact, the Church says

It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.³²

³⁰ PH, 1.

³¹ CDF, 1986 letter, 11.

³² CDF, 1986 letter, 10.

We may not understand the homosexual inclination experienced by others. In our humanity, we struggle with what is different and not understood. Whether we understand their actions or not, we must still treat others with dignity. The USCCB writes

One obstacle is intolerance of those perceived as different. It remains true that some persons identified as homosexual are victims of violence. The fact that homosexual acts are immoral may never be used to justify violence or unjust discrimination.³³

Providing Support

Rooted in Christian love, we need to help provide support for those who struggle with sin, homosexuality or otherwise. We must heed the words of Jesus

They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4).

We fall short of what God asks of us if we condemn a person for their sins and do nothing to help them resist temptation. Temptation is real. One place for Catholics struggling with homosexuality to turn to for help is an apostolate called "Courage". You can find out more at <https://couragerc.org/>. Recognizing that homosexuality can also be a struggle for family members of those with homosexual inclinations, they offer ministry specifically geared to family members at <https://couragerc.org/for-families/>.

In considering how to support people with homosexual inclinations, we do well to acknowledge any way in which we struggle with chastity. There are many who struggle with pornography, masturbation, or a strong desire for sexual intercourse or gratification even with a person of the opposite sex outside of marriage. Even a husband and wife united in a sacramental marriage may struggle with focusing too much on the other for physical sexual pleasure that goes against chastity.

Here one might consider seeking intercessory prayers from saints like St. Maria Goretti or St. Agnes who resisted sexual impurity to the point of martyrdom. Before his conversion, St. Augustine led a sexually impure life, living with a woman and fathering a child without being married. When he came to Christ, he changed but found it a struggle to be chaste. He is known for admitting in his writings that, *at first*, he prayed, "Lord, make me chaste but not yet." We may know we need to change but finding it difficult to do so for "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*" (Mark 14:38b).

In considering how to help those struggling with the homosexual inclination, we need to admit that we can all struggle with temptation and sin. We might struggle with different sins than others but we are all familiar with sin. These struggles can be our Cross to bear.

The way of perfection passes by the way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle.³⁴

³³ USCCB, Guidelines, 14.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2015.

Controlling our behavior

We have freedom to choose how we act. That does not mean we *should* do whatever we want. In an address during his 1995 visit to the United States Pope John Paul II said

Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.³⁵

Whatever temptations we face, we need to learn discipline to control our behaviors. This can be a lifelong challenge that is not won in a day for “Self-mastery is a *long and exacting work*.”³⁶

We are all called, no matter what our sexual inclinations are, to chastity.

Chastity includes an *apprenticeship in self-mastery* which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy.³⁷

To succeed in chastity, we need the cardinal virtue of temperance, “which seeks to permeate the passions of the senses with reason.”³⁸

One step in this self-mastery of sexual inclinations is to realize we can have a relationship that does not involve sex.

A homosexual person can have an abiding relationship with another homosexual without genital sexual expression. Indeed the deeper need of any human is for friendship rather than genital expression.³⁹

In our pastoral care, we must remember

Persons who experience same-sex attraction and yet are living in accord with Church teaching should be encouraged to take an active role in the life of the faith community⁴⁰

And understand that, regardless of one’s inclinations

Catholics who are living in accord with the Church’s moral teachings are invited and encouraged to participate fully and regularly in the sacramental life of the Church.⁴¹

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, “Homily of his holiness John Paul II” during his Apostolic Journey to America. Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore. October 8, 1995. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19951008_baltimore.html

³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2342.

³⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2339.

³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2341.

³⁹ USCCB Guidelines, 11 – quoted from National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices, *Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1973). 11.).

⁴⁰ USCCB Guidelines, 17.

⁴¹ USCCB, Guidelines, 20.

It is not merciful to hide the truth about sin from those living in sin. To be merciful is to do what is good for us. We need the truth. We should not downplay the Truth that God has given us.

Pastors of souls must therefore exercise patience and goodness; but they are not allowed to render God's commandments null, nor to reduce unreasonably people's responsibility. "To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls. But this must ever be accompanied by patience and goodness, such as the Lord Himself gave example of in dealing with people. Having come not to condemn but to save, He was indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals."⁴²

while being honest and acknowledge that

However, the Church has a right to deny roles of service to those whose behavior violates her teaching.⁴³

We need to provide a place where those who struggle with sin (homosexuality, chastity, or other) can find people who care. We all need intimacy. Yet, not all intimacy need involve sexual activity. Not all love is the same type of love.

One way in which the Church can aid persons with a homosexual inclination is by nurturing the bonds of friendship among people. In their analysis of human nature, the ancient philosophers recognized that friendship is absolutely essential for the good life, for true happiness. Friendships of various kinds are necessary for a full human life, and they are likewise necessary for those attempting to live chastely in the world. There can be little hope of living a healthy, chaste life without nurturing human bonds. Living in isolation can ultimately exacerbate one's disordered tendencies and undermine the practice of chastity.⁴⁴

To help our neighbors in this struggle we need to provide love and compassion, not hate. We need to provide an environment where they feel love, welcome, and support, showing them the dignity they deserve

The Appearance of Supporting Same-Sex Unions

While we may be adamant in our belief that to engage in homosexual acts is sinful and would never do so ourselves, we may have a family member or co-worker who decides to enter a same-sex union outside the church. We find ourselves torn between loving them as someone important to us and living our Catholic faith free from sin. Can we go to their "wedding"?

West addresses this area

The *Catechism* observes that we share in the responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them by: participating in them directly and voluntarily; praising or

⁴² PH, 10 (interior quote from *Humanae Vitae* 29).

⁴³ USCCB, Guidelines, 17.

⁴⁴ USCCB, Guidelines, 10.

approving them; not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so: or protecting evil doers in their evil doing.⁴⁵

To go to the wedding is to *celebrate* what they are doing. If we join in the celebration, then we are saying what they are doing is good. Same-sex union is not good. It is not something to celebrate.

Businesses can share in the struggle. Here I think of bakers and florists who refuse to bake a cake or provide flowers for same-sex “unions.” If they did so, they would be providing support for the celebration, giving the appearance of approving of the behavior.

This is not in any way to say that it is acceptable for any business to refuse to serve same-sex couples. For instance selling shoes to a same-sex couple does not in anyway condone their relationship. It is no different than selling shoes to two friends who come into the store together. The same can be true for a restaurant serving any two friends.

Interacting with Family and Friends with Homosexual Inclination

Perhaps you have a family member or a friend who identifies as homosexual. If you do, the obvious question is “how are we to interact with them?”.

The answer to this starts by saying if they have the homosexual inclination but are living chaste lives with no homosexual acts, then there is no problem at all. They are living as the Church teaches.

The problem of knowing how to interact with them only arises when they engage in homosexual acts. The first thing to always do is to treat them with dignity and love. They are God’s children.

For family members we may naturally encounter them at family gatherings. God wants us to be polite and cordial. There is a right time and a wrong time to bring up the issue. For instance, the middle of a funeral of a loved one is not the right time to bring it up. An open public setting or the home of a third party may not be the place to approach any difficult topic. On the other hand, when the circumstances suggest, perhaps God wants you to share our Church teaching with them. Let God be your light.

For friends, we might ask ourselves what we mean by “friends”. Are they casual acquaintances we run into now and then? Or are they really close friends? God knows what your relationship with them is. Ask God to help you know what to do. Remember Jesus’ words in Mark’s Gospel

When they lead you away and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the holy Spirit (Mark 13:11).

Here are some questions you might ask yourselves when debating if God is calling you to say something, remain quiet, or (perhaps the hardest one) if you should continue the friendship.

⁴⁵ West, 158. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1868.

1. Do you know what you believe yourself about God’s teaching on sexuality?
2. Do they know what you believe about sexuality?
3. Are you being honest with them?
4. If you keep silent, (especially if you have not spoken up before), how do they interpret your silence? Remember, silence can often be interpreted as agreement or acceptance.
5. Are you helping them be the best version of themselves as God sees them? Are they helping you be the best version of yourself in God’s eyes? (See Matthew 23:4 above.)

Blessing Same-sex Relationships

This brings us to the question recently addressed by the CDF, “Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?”⁴⁶ The question comes in trying to offer pastoral care.

In some ecclesial contexts, plans and proposals for blessings of unions of persons of the same sex are being advanced. Such projects are not infrequently motivated by a sincere desire to welcome and accompany homosexual persons, to whom are proposed paths of growth in faith, “so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives”[1].⁴⁷

However, while the concern is rooted in a genuine desire for pastoral care, the answer to blessing same-sex couples is no. To understand why the answer is no, we need to understand what a blessing is.

Blessings are considered sacramentals.

Among the liturgical actions of the Church, the sacramentals have a singular importance: “These are sacred signs that resemble the sacraments: they signify effects, particularly of a spiritual kind, which are obtained through the Church’s intercession. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions of life are sanctified”. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* specifies, then, that “sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church’s prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it” (#1670).⁴⁸

To bless something is to proclaim it good. However, something contrary to what God has divinely revealed and that goes against the natural order of things is not good and thus not to be blessed.

It is **very important** to understand this only applies to blessing those in an active same-sex relationship. For we read in the document

⁴⁶ Catholic News Agency, March 15, 2021 “Full Text: Vatican doctrinal office’s response to a question on the blessing of same-sex unions” <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-vaticans-doctrinal-office-response-and-note-on-the-blessing-of-same-sex-unions>.

⁴⁷ Catholic News Agency, March 15, 2021, “Full Text: Vatican doctrinal office’s response to a question on the blessing of same-sex unions” <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-vaticans-doctrinal-office-response-and-note-on-the-blessing-of-same-sex-unions>.

⁴⁸ Catholic News Agency, Full Text of Vatican Response.

The answer to the proposed dubium does not preclude the blessings given to individual persons with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching. Rather, it declares illicit any form of blessing that tends to acknowledge their unions as such. In this case, in fact, the blessing would manifest not the intention to entrust such individual persons to the protection and help of God, in the sense mentioned above, but to approve and encourage a choice and a way of life that cannot be recognized as objectively ordered to the revealed plans of God[11].”⁴⁹

Thus, it is acceptable to bless those with a homosexual inclination who strive to live a chaste life in accord with God’s plan.

The Church has a Right to Its Stance on Same-Sex Union

I find it ironic that those who speak of tolerance and relativism (that there is no universal truth), want to silence the church for its stance on same-sex union (along with other moral issues). Why is it acceptable for those who support same-sex union to publicly state their beliefs when we, as a Church, cannot state we are against it?

As seen in the scripture quotes above, the Church’s teaching on homosexuality is not something it created in recent years. It is part of our Catholic identity.

Since sexual ethics concern fundamental values of human and Christian life, this general teaching equally applies to sexual ethics. In this domain there exist principles and norms which the Church has always unhesitatingly transmitted as part of her teaching, however much the opinions and morals of the world may have been opposed to them. These principles and norms in no way owe their origin to a certain type of culture, but rather to knowledge of the Divine Law and of human nature. They therefore cannot be considered as having become out of date or doubtful under the pretext that a new cultural situation has arisen.⁵⁰

West compares the Church’s teaching on homosexuality to the idea of “brand identities” as he writes

Since we’re so familiar with “brand identities” in our culture, perhaps we could look at it this way. Nike has every right to safeguard its brand to maintain its distinctive line of shoes in the marketplace, and it would be seriously wrong for the courts to allow a *different* shoe company to call itself Nike. It’s the same with Marriage. Marital love is a specific kind of love – a specific “brand” of love – manifested in husband and wife becoming “one flesh” for the sake of their own good and for the procreation and education of children. People of the same sex can express love for each other in a great many ways, but not in *this* way, not in a *marital* way. It’s physically, biologically, and ontologically impossible.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Catholic News Agency, Full Text of Vatican Response.

⁵⁰ PH, 5.

⁵¹ West, *Good News*, 146.

Conclusion

Our sexuality is an integral part of who we are in our individual identity. Properly understood, sexuality is a wonderful expression of love that involves ***both*** procreative and unitive elements that are not possible between two people of the same-sex. Here West writes

But this I will readily grant you: While it's impossible to *raise* what same-sex couples do with their genitals to the level of what husbands and wives can do with theirs, it is possible to *reduce* what husbands and wives do with their genitals to the level of what same-sex couples do with theirs: engage in the pursuit of sterile pleasure.⁵²

What does he mean by husbands and wives *reducing* their genitals? He is referring to the fact that when heterosexual couples deny (by using contraception) the procreative aspect of sexual intimacy, they are removing an essential element of what God intended sexual intimacy to be. The comparison West makes is to say that homosexual acts cannot, by their very nature, be procreative.

While some remove the procreative aspect, others remove the unitive aspect of sexual intimacy, choosing to engage in sexual acts merely for physical pleasure. This too lessens the fullness of sexual intimacy.

I hope that this document has helped you understand and appreciate what our faith teaches about homosexuality as well as sexuality in general. We are not called to hate those living in sin. We are called to treat them with dignity, love and mercy, just as we ask God to do to us when we sin.

In speaking of how we are to treat anyone who has sinned, I end with the words of Jesus in Luke 6:36, "*Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful.*"

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⁵² West, *Good News*, 148.

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